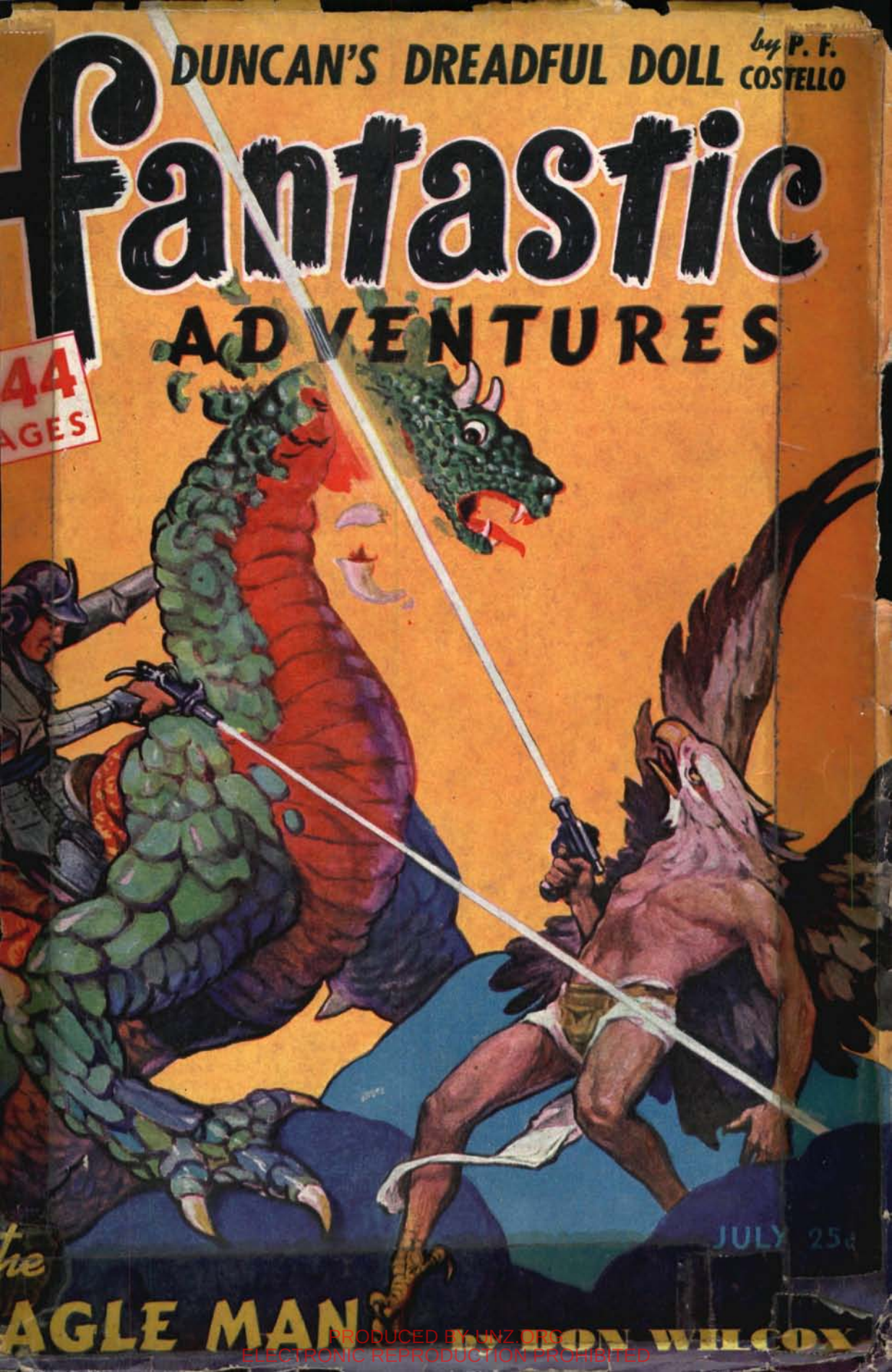

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UGLY SCALES?

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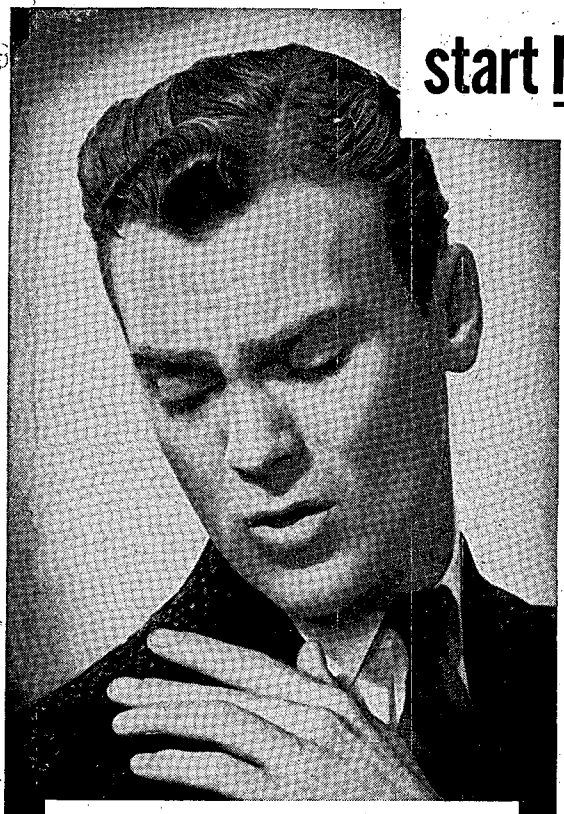

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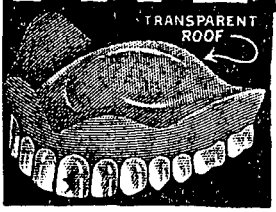

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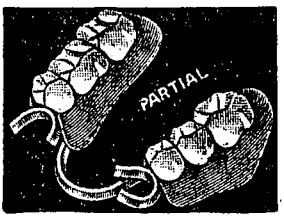

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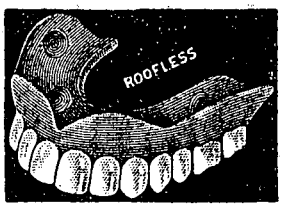

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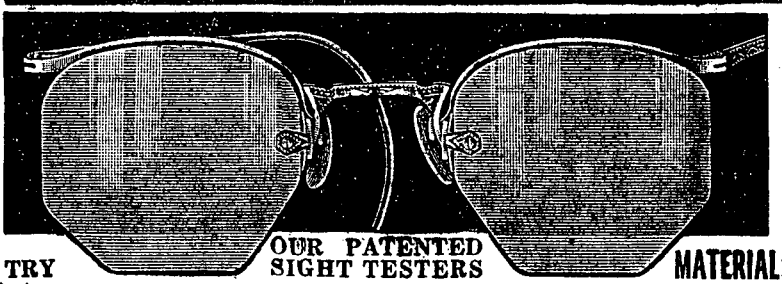

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VOL. 4
NO. 7

Fantastic ADVENTURES 1942

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John illustrating a scene from "The Eagle Man"
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting "Zeus, The Thunder God"

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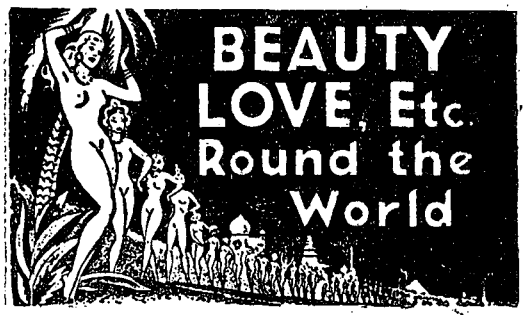

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WHAT does an editor do when he isn't editing? Well, in our case, he bowls. He bowls in four leagues, two of them mixed, because he loves the company of gals who can "throw that old apple." And right at the present time, all this deserves mention, because if anything looks screwy in this issue, it's because your editor launched his moth-eaten sphere down the planks last week for a 195-277-187—659, and he hasn't gotten over the shock as yet.

WHICH gives you some idea of what we hope to do to you with this issue; bowl you over! We've got eleven stories in this issue again, and we think they are going to register as eleven strikes with you all. If this column can register its usual (ahem) pocket hit, that'll make it a perfect game.

Just take a gander at the names on the contents page, if you think not! Wilcox—O'Brien—McGivern—Williams—Bloch—Costello—Derleth . . . all names to conjure with. The first three are 1-2-3 in the nation, and the next three are in the first 10. Then we all know Derleth, the famed Wisconsin novelist. Nor could you say the remaining names are ones to toss lightly aside: Jarvis, Lewis, Brittain, and Harris. Two are newcomers to our magazine, but not newcomers to the pulp field! Not by a long shot. So chalk up a classic-league team for July!

WE have a hunch you are going to go for Wilcox's long novel, complete in this issue. It was inspired by J. Allen St. John's cover, and the cover in turn was inspired by the legend of Jupiter and Leda. Remember? Jupe fell in love with Leda, but he was in heaven and she was on earth. So to make a rendezvous possible, he gave her a pair of wings. It didn't pan out so well . . . but never mind, Wilcox and St. John reversed the procedure, and they did a better job.

LEFTY FEEP! We are beginning to hear that name ringing in our ears. Fan letters are pouring in saying how much they like the mammoth little liar! Give us more Lefty Feep! you scream. Well, we're doing it, ain't we? Every issue, if possible. And he's in this one with a story that we pick for an anthology somewhere. Take notice, O'Brien, Stong, et al! Ever hear of the guy most of the advertisements are written for? The "average man" who is their intended target? Well, when you read this latest Feep episode, you'll find that theme enlarged in a way that'll make the welkin ring. Advertising agencies please read—if you can take a joke, and can stand a laugh!

FOR those of you who like time-travel, William P. McGivern has specially done "Safari to the Lost Ages." It's everything a time yarn should be, plus a lot of "story." Let us know how it strikes you. Bill wrote this one around a cover by Malcolm Smith which was ditched because we just couldn't get a pretty girl on it. You see, there was a girl, several in fact, but the more we had 'em done over, the lousier they looked. And thereby hangs the tale. So, rather than hold up a grand story, we ran it sans cover, and threw in the Wilcox-St. John duo. We know you'll approve.

NEXT month we're going to have a grand new story by Edmond Hamilton, based on a cover by a new artist. It's called "The Daughter of Thor" and don't let that mislead you! If you ever had a pleasant surprise, Hamilton will dish it out for you with this yarn.

WE might as well reveal a few of the treats in the coming August issue. We sure don't want you to miss them. First, Lefty Feep with Robert Bloch, in "The Little Man Who Wasn't All There." Er, now let's see, who *does* tell those stories, Bloch, or Feep? Or is Feep, Bloch? Or maybe a character can be too good! Sort of submerge the author . . .

Second, McGivern brings back that little scamp, Tink. The little fellow "Takes Command" in this one, but of what we won't say. It's sure worth reading, though. And don't say we didn't tell—oh, oh, more corn!

Added attractions: a novel called "The Son Of Death" by Robert Moore Williams. And that ought to be enough to bring you to the newsstand on the run in itself. Bob sure can turn out the whoppers when he puts his hand to it. "Creegar Dares To Die" by David Wright O'Brien, a story of the future and plenty of action in a place called the "tubeways." "The Kid From Kalamazoo" by Eric Frank Russell—really a fine piece of writing. These English lads can pour it on. Another English writer who comes back is the ever-popular Thornton Ayre with "The Mental Gangster."

WORD comes that the "Whispering Gorilla" is coming back. A new yarn on this fantastic character is being done by David V. Reed, who

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has "borrowed" the character from its originator, Don Wilcox.

THIS editor has a fantastic suggestion that might solve our defense cost problem. Why not charge a tax of one mill on every quart of air breathed daily? Not so much, you say? Well, figure this one out for yourself. The fantastic fact is that this insignificant little tax would cost you about $17.00 a day—and if that wouldn't be the greatest revenue-producing tax Congress ever passed, we aren't a fantasy editor.

FANTASY fiction authors have written several stories about what would happen if a plane could fly faster than sound. One writer had the plane disintegrating. But why there should have been any argument on the subject is beyond us. There's a little insect called the deer fly which has answered it fully with an actual demonstration. Its real name is *Cephenomyia*. It is perhaps the fastest living thing that science has ever observed. According to scientific tests, his best speed is 818 miles per hour, or about 400 yards per second. When attempts are made to photograph his progress, all that is recorded on the film is a blurred streak without any appearance of color. In fact, the deer fly travels faster than sound. And by golly, it doesn't disintegrate!

There is another fact about these little insects that is interesting. The males can fly faster than the females, which we think is a fine thing. Nature sure is a sharp one! She takes care of her children, and makes sure there are more of them! Be too bad if the poor male couldn't catch up and yell "pull over to the lilac bush, you!"

But the male is pretty smart too, in addition to his speed. He flys higher than the female, where the air is thinner, and resistance less. Now that's what we call "passing" in physics. Imagine a tiny thing like a deer fly playing scientist!

WE HAVE a grudge against Popeye. He's always been telling us spinach is what makes him strong, and advising us to eat it. As a result we've swallowed barrels of the messy stuff, and our muscles are still vibrating in every breeze. You see, savants have now delighted the youth of the nation by proving that although spinach is richer in iron and calcium than most foods, the darned stuff is in a form that can't be used by the human body. And to make it worse, the protein content is not as great as we supposed. So okay, sonny, if you don't want to eat your spinach, don't! But eat your parsley! Or don't you like that either?

TALK about vampires! The Germans and Japs have reversed the procedure. Only the vampires are traveling blood banks which roam the battlefields *giving* blood to wounded soldiers. In order to make this practicable, each soldier's identification tag also carries the number of his blood group, so that there is no time wasted when he needs a transfusion.

FANTASTIC patents? Just take a gander at Number 2,094,614. Mr. Otis L. Miller of Memphis, Tennessee has developed a process for treating cigarettes with certain chemicals to produce smoke of any desired color.

He says that very stylish women always attempt to have all the colors about them in perfect harmony. Grayish-smoke color does not harmonize well, so he invented the process to give women a chance to buy a cigarette whose smoke will blend with her color scheme for the day.

Mr. Miller also says that the chief enjoyment of a cigarette is realized from watching the smoke, and by having the smoke colored, the enjoyment will be increased. Kid stuff, we say.

SPEAKING of kids, when we were one, we always wondered where the mosquitoes went in the winter. It was an insoluble mystery to us. In fact once when we were told they hid in the walls, we ruined the plaster in our bedroom trying to dig them out. It develops we looked in the wrong place. Mosquitoes are like bears, they hibernate in caves in the winter. And apparently they find Tennessee a particularly good haven, because of the caves in that state. Exploration of these caves revealed the fact that they hibernate in them—and most of the hibernators are female. Which seems to conform with the usual thing—the poor male is left out in the cold.

But the mosquito doesn't like it pitch dark. He (or she) needs a sort of twilight. So, walls are too dark for him. Which means, leave the plaster alone—or you'll get a whipping!—*Rap*

"Well, what else did you expect?"

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The EAGLE MAN

by DON WILCOX

Fire Jump was taken from the ship in chains

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If the vulture men were to survive, they must have mates; so they kidnaped them. But Fire Jump's mate came to him willingly

MY huge brown wings hung limply like the wings of a dead vulture strung up by its feet. I was pacing my state-room floor. The incredibly swift space flight was almost over.

Counter motors sent jarring vibrations through my tough yellow talons as I padded back and forth. The steamy blue lake of oblivion outside my window began to take on distinctive form. Hard purple lines of mountain ranges pushed up through the atmosphere. We were arriving on Karloora's single satellite—the so-called Blue Moon.

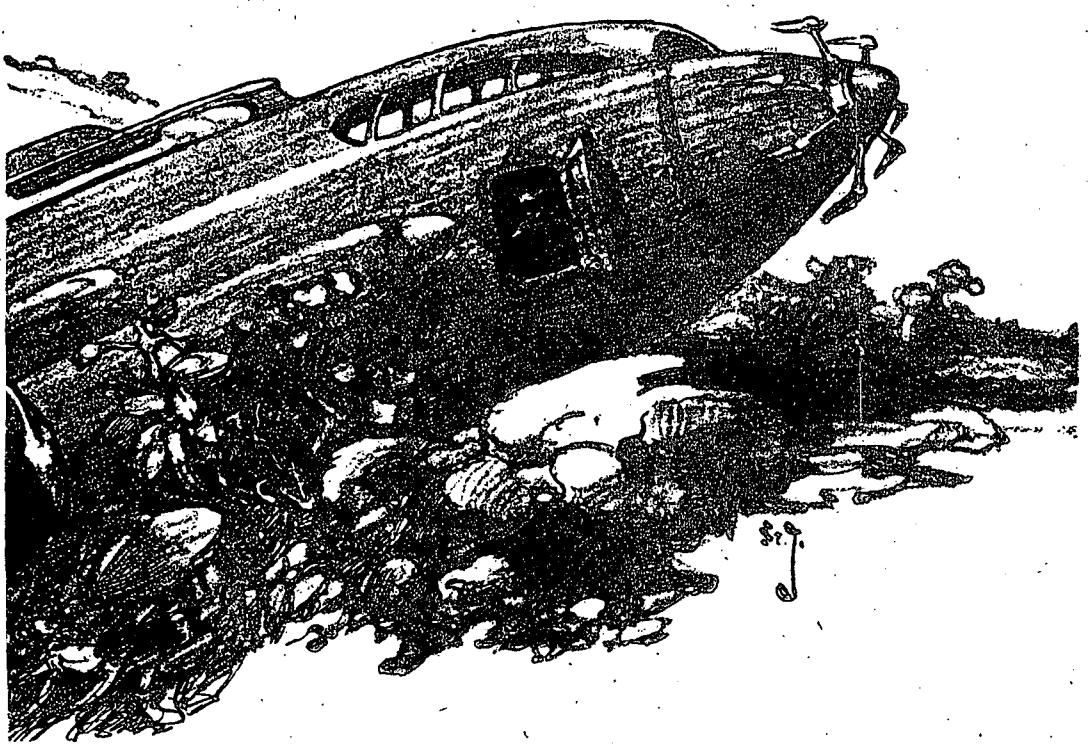
As usual, the low leathery voice of Flanger, my owner, dominated the welter of sounds from the fore of the ship. But everyone else was talking excitedly too, speaking in the universal interplanetary tongue disseminated in recent centuries from the distant Earth planet.

Everyone was talking except yours truly. I was behind a locked door. This flight wasn't my idea.

As we swooped down into a cliff-walled valley toward a smooth landing spot, I denied to myself that any thrill of excitement leaped through my drooping wings.

Like my spirit, these wings of mine were dead weight.

In all my seventeen years they had never once lifted me. In spite of the



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massive muscles I had developed over my chest and back, in spite of my tireless practice, I had yet to fly. My human body was too heavy.

Would today be a new day?

Would the light gravitation on the Blue Moon make all the difference?

Flanger had said it would, and he had brought me here to prove it. If I succeeded, he would be on his way to a vast fortune.

Actually I was vibrating to the toes of my yellow talons with feverish expectancy. But Flanger and the others mustn't know it. Above all, they mustn't guess my cunning. For I hated Flanger and all his men, and secretly damned them for capitalizing on my agonized life.

The ship stopped. The floors and walls were silent around me. I ceased to pace. I crowded close against the window, locking my human hands upon the frames. I caught the slightest reflection of my sharp-beaked eagle face in the crystal pane. My eyes were burning too bright. But I couldn't help it. That scene beyond the window—

What a landscape! There it lay, a strange new world, waiting to be conquered. And here I stood, hardly daring to breathe—hardly daring to admit to myself that the moment for hope had come.

It was as if the fuse of my explosion had burned steadily through seventeen years of silent hatred, and now there were only inches left to go.

The moment was at hand. I looked out on the landscape—a wide lazy river, a vast green meadow, lofty rugged trees, and on either horizon rows of majestic purple cliffs.

My heart was thumping wildly. I glanced down to discover that my sharp scaled claws were gripping at the smooth floor as if hungry for the feel of ragged rocks and shaggy tree limbs.

THE old consuming fire of mystery flamed through me momentarily. Why had my makers planted the wild instincts of the eagle within my breast? Wasn't it enough to give my human body an eagle's head, eagle's wings, and eagle's feet? If the scientists had simply turned to grafting experiments for cruel sport, couldn't they at least have dulled my consciousness with some lifelong anesthetic, instead of sharpening it with the suspicions, the avarice, the cunning and cruelty of an eagle?

A key sounded in the lock of my stateroom door.

I sprang back from the window lightly and pretended to be lounging half asleep in a corner.

The door swung open.

"All right, Eagle Boy. Come on."

Flanger snapped his fingers at me as he gave his curt orders. Five or six of his helpers stood in the doorway with him. Two of them were his regular assistants, Tokel and York, who were well known by me. For many seasons past they had bestowed upon me their peculiar brand of care, which might be called the punch-and-slap treatment. According to Flanger, they had given me the very discipline I needed.

"Let's wake him up with a few marble shots."

This suggestion came from one of the passengers to whom I was still a novelty. The eight or ten strangers that Flanger had brought along had made a popular game of me, shooting marbles at me from pneumatic guns. My quickness in dodging never ceased to amaze them.

Actually I had always been far quicker than they knew. Neither they nor Flanger guessed that their pot shots brushed my wings only when I intended them to. It was part of my cunning

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to keep my phenomenal celerity a secret.

"No time for marble shots now," said Flanger. "Save your fun till we start back. We'll all have to work fast. You all know your jobs. We won't risk any more time here than necessary. The pilot is staying at the controls. You newsmen—get your cameras going. Don't miss anything . . . All right, come on, Eagle Boy. Operation number one is to clamp a safeguard on your foot."

The observers watched me closely while Tokel and York locked a chain of *claytung* metal above my left claw. Somebody muttered that I was being strangely silent, considering that I was the star of this momentous experiment.

"I didn't plan the experiment." I spoke sullenly. My throaty voice was naturally edged with a slight rasping which always tended to create suspicions among strangers.

One of the two newsmen jotted my words in his notebook; they were sharp to snatch at any hint of cynicism or rebellion on my part.

"Save your talk, men," Flanger said, "till we get outside."

I saw him lower his straight black eyebrows meaningfully at the two newsmen. He didn't want anything to upset me. He had given me several curtain lectures recently, urging my cooperation. And since I hadn't snapped back at him with ugly words he was hopeful that I was in an obedient mood.

I OVERHEARD the newsmen mumbling comments about Flanger. Flanger handled me shrewdly, they said, in spite of my obstreperous nature. They considered him a smart business man, destined to become one of Karloora's financial magnates. There was no doubt that he would make the most of me—and eventually thousands more like me.

The chain on my left foot was annoying. I gave a savage kick as they led me across the room.

"Why the shackles, Wooden Face?" I cracked, turning my eagle eyes full on Flanger. I could always make him uncomfortable by pressing a square gaze on him, or by talking when he wanted silence. But to call him Wooden Face, especially while he was parading his importance before his subordinates, was like touching him with a flame gun. I repeated, "Why the shackles, Wooden Face?"

"Wooden Face," one of the newsmen grinned, and he scrutinized Flanger's tight hard features with new interest.

Flanger chose to ignore the insult and enter into no disciplinary ceremonies under these conditions. "The shackles are for your protection, Eagle Boy." He was trying so hard to be patient that his voice was silky.

"Protection?" I squawked. "Am I in danger?"

"You might be if you fly too far."

"I won't fly too far."

"This new gravity will give you a lift. You might fly too far before you mean to."

"Then I'll fly back," I said.

"You might run into some of those dragon-like beasts—the *growsers*. This satellite isn't tamed, you know."

"Then it's a poor place to bring a creature like me," I said. "I've had so much taming I'm weighed down with it. I'm so tame that Tokel and York only get to beat me twice a day."

"Stop that squawk, will you?" Tokel gave me a nasty look.

"Quiet, men," said Flanger. He pushed me along through the corridor of the ship, pressing my elbow in silent warning. In a low voice he said, "No more of your smart talk, or you *won't* fly. You won't be able."

"I know," I retorted sarcastically.

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"You'll beat me till my feathers fall out."

"Not only your feathers. Your heart and your guts."

"After all the money you've spent to get me here? Very likely." I didn't try to hold back my sarcastic tones. "You didn't bring me here to bury me, Wooden—" I broke off with a sharp click of my beak. "What's the meaning of the guns?"

I pointed ahead to Tokel and York and two other assistants preceding us down the steps to the air-locks. All of them were packing late-model disintegration guns.

One of the men turned back to laugh at me. "Don't get nervous, Eagle Boy. We won't use them on you."

THERE was considerable light banter about the chances of having to use the *disint* guns. A few of the men had visited this moon before, and they declared, all joking aside, that there could be trouble. The *growsers* were as nimble as herds of wild horses, and as treacherous as any breed of dragons in this planetary system.

"And yet the *growsers* can be domesticated, you know," someone said. "There's a race of *growser*-riders here on the Blue Moon—men like ourselves, only savage."

"And that isn't all," said one of the newsmen. "There's a big race of—"

"Shut up!" Flanger exploded. Then suddenly several of the party seemed to be watching me out of the corners of their eyes, as if wondering whether I had caught the drift of the suppressed talk. I was in the dark.

We passed through the air-locks and out into the open. The coolness of thick grasses felt good against the cushions of my scaled feet. An exhilaration came upon the party, as if they might have been the sole discoverers of this picturesque valley. Obviously they had chosen a good landing spot for our short stay, for there were no likely hiding places for wild beasts.

At least not in our immediate vicinity. The soft meadow stretched like a mile-wide carpet all around us. Under the triangle of Karloora's suns it was as bright and glossy as fresh paint. But not to be mistaken for a park on Karloora. Two things were utterly new and different—the air and the gravity.

For several minutes we all indulged in clownish antics of jumping, tumbling, and running, to adjust our muscles to our new weightlessness.

Tokel and York found that they could leap to the fins of the space ship and land on their feet. I followed suit. It was easy. In fact I could have jumped clear over the ship without any help from my wings, if I had only been bound by a longer leash, for jumping was one of my special talents.

What might I do *with* my wings?

That remained to be seen. But I realized, all at once, that those thousands of hours of fruitless flying practice in my pen back in Karloora were mobilizing into new sensations of readiness. *I was sure I could fly.*

Every breath filled me with confidence. There was something about this thin fragrant air—something my lungs seemed to have known and forgotten—

"All right, Eagle Boy, this is your big chance to make a name." Flanger approached me with stolid determination.

"A name for myself," I said, "or for you?"

"Be a good fellow, now. The newsmen have got their cameras on you. Let's don't have any foolishness—"

"Or York and I will slap your beak down your throat," Tokel interpolated.

"All right, boys, take it easy," Flan-

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ger cooed. "He'll be all right. When we get him hitched up, you two can follow along after him and keep him working till he learns to take off. Now, let's have the end of that cable."

THEY evidently expected me to fly. At least they had come prepared to give me plenty of cruising range—a radius of seventy-five yards. They unwound the long flexible line of *claytung* wire from the spool they had fastened on the uppermost point of the space ship hull. Obviously they didn't intend for me to break away, for that line was stronger than steel. It would have held a mad three-ton *growser* charging down a hill. They fastened it to the *claytung* chain on my left foot and led me out over the meadow until the line tightened.

"Kick," Flanger said.

"Why?"

"To make sure it's solid."

"You mean I've got to fly with all that weight hanging to me?"

"Claytung isn't heavy," Flanger said.

"Wouldn't it be a lot simpler just to turn me loose and let me fly?"

Flanger didn't answer, and his straight black eyebrows were like two dabs of paint on an expressionless carved-wood face. Was he considering my suggestion? I couldn't tell. His two assistants exchanged sly nudges.

"Unfasten me and give me a chance to fly," I said, glaring hard at Flanger. "Don't you trust me?"

Tokel's lips twisted sardonically. "You wouldn't think of running away, would you, Eagle Boy?"

"Leave my nice warm cage? Why should I?" My squawking retort rasped with telltale cynicism, and suddenly the venom was spilling off my tongue. "I'd be lost without my daily beatings. I'd get homesick for someone to swing at my head with a club—"

At that instant York lashed out at me with his fist. I ducked the blow as easily as if I had had a five minute warning. But the next thing I knew they gave my chain a jerk and the two of them grabbed me and threw a few slaps at my eagle head. York and Tokel were both enormous men, the team of them outweighing me more than three to one. It was chiefly their brute strength that had qualified them to serve as my educators.

In a moment Flanger called them off, looking about to make sure the rest of the party hadn't taken this bit of diversion too seriously. Most of the men had gone to their assigned stations around the wide circle within which I was supposed to fly. But the newsmen were still close by, and Flanger warned them they must cut that last scene from their films.

Now at the end of my tether I obediently kicked to make sure the fastenings were solid.

"That's good." Flanger turned to the newsmen. "Be sure you get his feet in. I'm counting on your pictures to show any drag from the weight of the line. And don't forget—we want to run these films as soon as possible on the trip back. I'll direct the cutting myself . . . All set, Eagle Boy?"

THE precautions they had taken might have been calculated to make me blind with rage. It was plain that the ten men stationed around the ship in a big circle, each armed with a disintegration gun, were not there simply to guard against a possible attack from growsers or other wild beasts. They were stationed to form a fence of fire around me, in case I should happen to make a break.

These modern *disint* guns, as everyone knew, could cut a stream of death for precisely fifty yards—no farther.

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Flanger was a foresighted business man, all right. He wasn't going to let me get away.

The show began as soon as Flanger, armed with a disint of his own, marched back to the ship and perched himself on its tail. From that vantage point he could call directions to all the surrounding circle. He shouted at me and I went into action.

I did everything except what Flanger wanted me to do.

I hopped. I ran. I leaped and danced in all manner of awkward steps. Yes, and I flapped my wings with such vigor that part of the time they were convinced I was trying.

But I wasn't. I was biding my time until Tokel and York grew careless and some of the ten guards drifted away from their original positions.

The long line of claytung wire scraped over the green meadow in a gently curved loop as I dragged it on, round after round. Gradually I circled in closer, and the guards unconsciously moved a few feet inward. Particularly one tall skinny guard with sleepy eyes.

And all the while I continued my pretense of trying to fly. Every new suggestion that Flanger or the others shouted at me I tried—or made a show of trying.

Then suddenly I struck with all the speed and cunning at my command.

It happened as I was approaching the tall skinny guard. His disint gun was hanging loosely in his hip pocket.

I took off with a swift leap, *and flew.*

I flew around the outside of him so fast that he never knew what struck him. It was the claytung wire, of course. It caught him at the knees and threw him just as he started to spin around.

The impact hurled him off the ground. It hurled the gun still higher. I whirled on my wings and darted for it—yes, and snatched it out of the air.

By the time York and Tokel caught their breath to shout, I was firing a disint stream squarely at the long wire that bound me.

I meant to disintegrate it. One break in that wire would set me free.

BUT it didn't break. My disint fire spilled off it like water off a greased log. I flew straight back over the curved line, spraying it with the gun's ray. *It refused to disintegrate.*

Then I remembered. High-grade claytung is the one common metal that disint guns can't penetrate.

I flew like the wind, straight for the center of the circle—the space ship.

Why?

Because there was still one hope that I might sever the line and gain my freedom. It was a desperate chance, but I had to take it. I was over my head in rebellion and there was no turning back.

My goal was the bolt in the top of the space ship to which the claytung spool was fastened.

Flanger saw me coming. He leaped high off his perch—the tail of the ship—momentarily forgetting his adjustments to the lighter gravity. He spilled down to the ground in a heap, but came bounding up again, running toward the slack line of wire that lay in the grass. Did he think he could hold me back?

I swept over him like a gust of wind. Shooting on across the ship I felt that I might be turned into a gust of wind any instant. With everyone yelling at me madly, someone was sure to lose his head and fire a blaze of disint at me.

Above the center of the ship I cut my speed and criss-crossed my gunfire over the claytung spool. The bolt that held it disintegrated. The spool slipped loose and slid down over the hull. *I was free.*

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Free, except for the weight of a seventy-five yard wire clinging to my left foot.

The guards were running in toward me, setting up their fence of purple disint fire to surround me. They didn't believe I could fly straight up, burdened down with such a weight.

But I thought otherwise. When it's a matter of freedom or bondage a man can muster superhuman powers—and so can an eagle man.

I spiralled upward so swiftly that I felt a terrific jerk on my legs as I hoisted the full weight of chain, wire, and spool. My wings trembled for an instant and the muscles of my back fought furiously.

Then it was won—my good wings were holding me—I was still rising—up—up—

I glanced back and caught a brief sight of the guards far below me. I was above the range of their guns, now. They would never get me back within range again—not if I could help it.

Nor within range of their voices. Whatever this strange new world might hold for me, I was done with bondage.

I sped straight for the narrowing purple canyon, some four or five miles ahead.

Then as I looked down for the first time at the seventy-five yard wire swinging from my left foot, I saw there was something more than the claytung spool hanging to it.

There was Flanger, riding astride that spool, looking up at me, shaking his fist.

CHAPTER II

MY WINGS almost dropped me. I looked again—yes, Flanger meant to ride me down. It was more than a fist he was shaking at me. It was a deadly gleaming disint. My wing twinged. I was cutting over the land at high speed, but that twinge started me darting down at a steep angle.

I heard Flanger's cry, then. He thought he was going to crash to the ground. I pulled up sharply, and my passenger, swinging seventy-five yards below me, barely skimmed over an outcropping of rocks.

At once I spiralled for more elevation, and again he was yelling up at me, waving his gun.

What had happened to my own disint? It was gone. I must have dropped it during that tense moment of climbing the air above the space ship. I had released all impediments during that crucial moment.

I was going to miss that gun. There was trouble ahead. There's nothing like a gun when you've got to argue your way through trouble. It gives you confidence somehow, and that was what I needed.

That was all. I didn't want to kill the man. In all my seventeen years of hating him my passion to kill had seldom ever been wasted on Flanger. On Tokel and York—yes. But Flanger—I only wanted to escape him.

To me, Flanger was symbolical of nearly all men, as I knew them—tough-minded, stubborn, hard-working, bent on business goals that made them willing to endure the prison-like confinement and routine of civilized life. I wanted to escape all men.

I made surprising speed toward the higher purple cliffs up the valley. To be able to fly at all was intoxicating. But the thrill of cutting through the air faster than a dart was enough to blind me with joy.

The valley rose toward a distant range of dark mountains and already I was skimming over narrowing canyons. I fought for more altitude. High tree tops were threatening to dust the

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seat of Flanger's pants.

"Get back to the ship," he was yelling. I smiled down at him. The ship was four miles back of us—a dark dot on a small patch of green. The confusion of its passengers could no longer be seen.

"Enjoying your ride, Wooden Face?" I squawked, though I don't think he heard me. And I don't think his face was wooden, but rather like glowing coals, and decidedly contorted.

I soared back and forth over a fork of the canyon and combed it for what it might offer. By this time Flanger was yelling threats at me. He thought I couldn't keep flying much longer, and when I let him down he was going to give me some discipline I wouldn't forget.

"You've proved you can fly," he shouted. "Your act is over. I'll blast your damned wings full of holes—"

I SWOOPED down and let a passing treetop smack him across the breeches. It might have been an electric shock from the way he jumped and yelled. He bounced back on his seat, hugging the wire for dear life.

That little incident almost pulled a ligament in my wings. It served as a sharp warning that I couldn't afford any foolishness. It was time I set my burden down.

But how?

I circled, trying to spot a tree suitable for a perch. The giant timbers were as much as two hundred and fifty or three hundred feet tall.

"What are you trying to do, hang me?" Flanger was swinging perilously among the branches and he was blazing mad. "Set me down or I'll shoot your damned head off."

"Good joke!" I yelled back. The length of the wire put me twenty-five yards beyond his range, and he knew it. "Better do your shooting at the trees."

The suggestion wasn't funny to him. He took it, and the game grew lively. When he saw himself in danger of crashing into a branch, he fired his disint gun to dissolve it.

The severed branches would go crashing down into the shadowy forest far below. Once after such a crash I heard a rush of heavy hoofs, as if a herd of wild animals was stampeding.

At last I saw a way to put my burden down without setting him free. The answer was a magnificent overhanging cliff.

I spiralled down with care. My control was none too sure, and a little blundering would hurl Flanger against the naked basalt wall.

But I succeeded in letting the cable ride down past a niche in the outer point of the ledge. When three-fourths of it had coasted down like a rope over a pulley, I flew to the side, keeping the cable taut. I circled three times around a sturdy tree trunk. At last my lame left foot was relieved of the weight.

It took many minutes of rapid-fire pounding with edged rocks to cut the fetter. It was a tense moment when the link finally broke. I was out, breathing hard with excitement. A bird out of a cage—that was me.

Flanger?

I followed the taut cable to the edge of the cliff and peered over cautiously.

He was still sitting on the empty claytung spool at the end of the line, sixty yards below, swinging with dignified complacency. Again his face, half-tilted in a streak of late afternoon sun, was hard and wooden.

The sloping earth was nearly a hundred feet beneath him. The wall of cliff was cut back too deep to be visible from my vantage point. But

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it was well out of his reach, unless he undertook some risky pendulum swinging. And climbing would be uncertain, to say the least. *Flanger was my prisoner.*

I called down. "Wooden, I like the looks of this moon. I'm going to live here. You and I are parting company. But first I've got a few things to say."

EVEN as I spoke I caught disturbing sounds from a thickly wooded patch a short distance up the valley—a stamping of hoofs and the guttural snorting of some heavy forest animal.

Flanger barked up at me, a note of terror in his voice. "Eagle Boy, get me up from here. If you don't, I'll—"

"You'll do what, Wooden?"

"The boys will cook you in oil, damn you."

I gave a squawking laugh. It was an unnatural sensation to me to see Flanger writhe. He recovered himself quickly, however, now that the tramping noises ceased, though he was still casting about furtively at the ground below him.

At the same time I looked back over the tree tops to the patches of green meadow four miles away. *The space ship had lifted.*

It was a Labazoff convertible, geared for slow airflights, and now it was nosing along like an old-fashioned dirigible. The day was growing late, and the ship's shadow spread wide as it crawled over the meadow and across the outcropping of rocks. The Labazoff convertible was cruising toward us.

CHAPTER III

"WHAT have you got to say?" Flanger snarled up at me.

"I'm making a vow," I said. "I'm through with you and your race."

Flanger responded with forced laughter. His voice sounded strained, anyway, yelling up at me from so far down.

"Seventeen years ago you hired some scientists, Wooden." My voice was edged with hard accusation. "You put them to work making biological freaks, and they turned out me."

"What a memory. You even recall the faces of the scientists, no doubt?" Flanger was thrusting ridicule at me.

Of course I remembered nothing. I knew only what Flanger and others had told me.

The fact was, my curiosity about my origin had never been satisfied. Bendetti, the friendly magistrate, had never been able to get any information for me. He had always advised that I forget the past and face the present and the future.

Bendetti, if I have not mentioned it, was my one real friend. He had a sense of justice that made him the most respected of magistrates. It was a tremendous streak of fortune for me when he took an interest in me. Flanger used to let him visit with me for an hour each day, and that was where I acquired my acquaintance with man's knowledge.

My thoughts were jolted back to the present. Flanger was yelling up at me, and his arguments shot through me like icy arrows.

"You'll die if you stay here on the Blue Moon. You can't live out in the open like a beast."

"You imply that I'm not one? A pretty compliment, Wooden," I snorted.

"What will you eat? Rats and sparrows? You won't have any fire to cook your food."

"I'll eat," I said.

"And I suppose you won't freeze to death? What sweet dreams you'll have, sleeping in a tree—dreams about those warm red robes you used to curl up against. And that steamheated shelter

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at the north end of your pen—"

"I'll keep warm," I snapped defensively.

"You'll wake up every morning squawking. Where's your hot cereal drink? Where are Tokel and York? What about your exercises? Who'll shoot marbles at you for your jumping lessons?. . . . Eagle Boy, listen to me. I have a proposition."

During our swift exchange of words I had kept an alert eye on the approaching space ship. It had floated up the canyon as slowly as a boat pulls into port. But now it was steering away from us.

The reason for this was that in my flight with Flanger I had originally coursed toward the cliffs a mile or more to the west.

NOW, fortunately for me, Flanger's men were off my trail. I breathed easily.

"Your proposition?" I shouted down to Flanger.

"How would you like to be a leader?"

"What sort?"

"A disciplinarian."

"It's a deal," I said with a cynical squawk. "Let me discipline Tokel and York with a claytung chain."

"I'm talking business," Flanger snapped, smarting under my sarcasm. "You could be the trainer of other Eagle-Boys."

"There aren't any other Eagle-Boys," I said. "If there *are*, you never told me."

"What scientists have done, scientists can do," said Flanger. "You've done well, Eagle Boy, in spite of your ugly disposition. If you're smart, you'll take my offer. You'll come back to Karloora and be an officer over other Eagle-Boys. Don't worry, I can get them. How about it, man-to-man?"

"You mean man-to-freak," I said.

"I mean man-to-investment." Flanger shot the words up at me coldly. "I'm talking—*what are you looking at?*"

My eyes jerked away from the horizon, guiltily.

"So!" Flanger said with sharp intuition. "The ship's coming over."

"I wouldn't be too sure, Wooden."

Even as I spoke, the ship sank from sight. Probably it landed. Would the men scour these hillsides yet this evening? The three suns were already lowering. Days and nights on the Blue Moon were known to be short.

"Think fast, Eagle Boy," Flanger barked up at me. "You could be the leader of a new race of eagle men—"

"I've heard that myth before," I said. "I know why you want a thousand like me—or thousands of thousands. You want to train us into fighting animals, to be Karloora's soldiers, so you can send us out to conquer the planets—"

"You'll be national heroes."

"I don't believe it. We'd only be fighting freaks. We'd never be accepted as equals with men."

"How do you know?"

"Magistrate Bendetti told me. What's more, he told me that Karloora had no business striking out on new conquests. One word from Bendetti counts more than a million from you."

The man at the lower end of the swing must have shuffled uncomfortably, for the cable at my fingertips vibrated restlessly. Flanger was disturbed. I had got some of my long-pent-up venom off my chest.

"Damn Bendetti," I heard Flanger mutter to himself.

"If you get back to Karloora," I said, "tell Bendetti I won my freedom. Tell him I'm living where I'll never be troubled by you and your race again. But tell him I'm saving one memento, the gift he gave me."

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I GLANCED at my right side. My sole garment was a sturdily woven pair of trunks which bore a brilliant decoration—a big gold button, half as wide as my hand, with a deep-cut engraving of an eagle on it. I wore it just above my right hip-bone.

Flanger made no response. It was growing dark rapidly and I could no longer see him.

"I'm keeping it to remember the code that Bendetti taught me," I said. "Not your code, or York's, or Tokel's. But Bendetti's—the code of *fair play*. . . . Do you hear me, Wooden Face? . . ."

I looked down into the deep blackness. Evidently I had talked Flanger into stubborn silence.

"All right, Wooden," I said. "I'll give you a sample of fair play before I go. I'm going to set you down on solid ground. . . . But not just yet. I've got to look out for myself first. Hold on till I get back."

I ran along the cliff and hurled myself into the air, and my veteran wings spread wide to carry me up the valley.

The last of the triangle of suns had disappeared and only a few minutes of twilight were left. It was time I located a place to spend the night. Flanger could wait.

My wings ached but my heart was exuberant. I gloated over the words I had shot at Flanger.

Above all, I was proud of my vow. I repeated it over and over. *No more dealings with men.*

I swooped down to a gash in the face of the dark cliff. It was only a shallow concavity, but there was ledge enough to provide me a safe bed. Tomorrow I would explore for a more favorable home. Now to go back and release Flanger—

What was that noise?

It was a low moaning sound. It came from down in the blackness under the giant trees. It was a deep, sad, mellow voice—the voice of a man—a voice I had never heard before.

The call was indistinct. At first I couldn't understand. But as I drifted closer the strange enunciation became intelligible.

"Here I am," the voice moaned. "Here I am. . . Help me."

CHAPTER IV

THE pains of strained ligaments through my wings and back were nothing to the fever that rushed through my arteries.

My vow—my vow—no more dealing with men—

Impulsively I flew toward the purple sky, circling higher and higher, breathing hard at the thin air. But my eyes kept turning back toward that dense blackness whence the call had come.

My night's lodging was down there—but no, I could never close my ears and sleep against those moans of pain.

I hurled scorn at myself for my weak thoughts. Who *was* this man? No one I knew. And if I had known him, would he not be another Tokel or a York? What had brought on all this softness of the heart? Were these echoes of Bendetti?

Fair play!

I spiralled down swiftly, smiling to myself. Bendetti would have approved my plan. Freedom would still be mine—and fair play too.

I circled back to the cliff where the cable hung down. I called down into the blackness.

"Wooden Face! Someone up the valley has been hurt. You've got to help him. Then I'll let you go. . . . Do you hear me, Wooden?"

No answer. I peered down into the blackness and called again. My echoes

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floated back to me.

Was this a trick?

I tugged at the cable, trying to judge whether Flanger was still on it. I couldn't tell. I was too unaccustomed to the new gravity.

"Wooden! . . . Are you there?"

Hot resentment surged through my temples. He *was* there, of course. This was a scheme. He would sit tight until I pulled the cable up. And the instant I drew him over the cliff, he'd swing his gun on me.

Or *was* I mistaken?

I dropped a handful of tiny stones down the claytung plumb line. They struck with metallic clinks. The claytung spool was empty. *Flanger was gone.*

For several minutes I waited, listening, wondering. There was a deathly silence around me. The leaves were as motionless as dabs of black paint on a mural of midnight. There were no sounds of whispering birds. The thudding hoofs of an hour ago now seemed like something out of a dream.

UTTER silence! I shuddered. This was a strange sensation—to be completely alone. The very rustle of my wings startled me.

Bewildered over Flanger, I began to comb the thick darkness for any live thing that might be lurking about me.

I felt a wild impulse to fly over the hills to the spaceship. It must be there. Were the men on the search, or on guard, or asleep for the night?

What would they think if I should suddenly walk in on them? If I should tell them that Flanger had fallen into the jaws of a hungry dragon?

I flew south along the valley to return to the moaning man. My eagle eyes guided me down through wisps of valley mist, past the black tree trunks. Then I was over the prone form.

The man's groans had ceased. He was unconscious, breathing as if in sleep. As nearly as I could judge in the darkness he was a tall, rawboned, elderly man with long unkempt hair. His rough scanty clothing befitted a primitive huntsman. The back of his head was sticky with dried blood. The gash near the base of the skull had clotted within the past hour.

I tried to talk with him, but his only response was the single word, "Water," spoken with the same curious enunciation that I had noticed before.

I picked him up. He was limp but almost weightless in my powerful arms. I carried him along what seemed to be a valley path. I tried to thread my way across the valley, thinking to come upon a stream. But the soggy marshes and the thick underbrush turned me back.

"Where do I find water?" I asked him repeatedly. But his mumbled answer conveyed no directions to me.

I bore him on down the valley. Through the ebony night it seemed a trek of many miles. But in time the eastern sky brightened, and a dazzling, gigantic moon came over the horizon of rugged cliffs. It was Karloora.

By its soft creamy light I found a cool rock-bound spring.

I bathed the man's head and hands and the unclad portions of his sinewy old body. He breathed more easily and presently he began to mumble words. Strangely, he did not look at me.

"You are not Flint Fingers," he blurted suddenly, feeling of my hands. "Who are you?"

"A stranger," I said. "I found you down the trail, calling for help. Do you feel better?"

"Better," he murmured. "Has the night-sun come up?"

THIS was a strange question. He was referring, of course, to the re-

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flected light of Karloora. It was already shining upon his deep half-open eyes. Was he blind?

His next words confirmed my guess. "I see nothing. My sight left me when I fell. Are you someone I have seen before?"

"No."

"At least you are a friend," he said. "You may have heard my name. I am Stone Jaw. Whenever you come to the valley of the Clankolites, you may call Stone Jaw your friend."

"A strong name, Stone Jaw," I remarked.

"The name was given me for my fight when I became of age. Seven blows against my jaw failed to defeat me. And your name?"

"My name?" The corners of my hooked beak drew back cautiously. I was aware that this blind creature took me to be a man like himself. Must I tell him that all my life I had been called *Eagle Boy?*

"You may call me *Fire Jump.*"

CHAPTER V

"AN ODD name. How did you earn it?"

"When I became of age," I said slowly, "ten men hurled fire at me—but I jumped out of it."

"Men hurled fire at you? What kind of fire?"

"Streams of purple fire that you can barely see. It leaps out of metal tubes and eats everything in its path. But I jumped away from it."

"You must be a strong jumper. My daughter can jump to the back of a growser with a single bound, but I do not know whether she could jump away from the streams of purple fire. Where do you live?"

I put him off. "Tomorrow we'll talk. Now you must rest. I will care for you until morning."

The following day I helped him on his way. He was determined to go, heedless of his blindness. And yet he admitted there was danger of encountering wild beasts and dreaded vultures. So I insisted upon leading him.

It was a gain, not a loss, to me. Stone Jaw knew this land. I listened to him eagerly. When I described the features of the landscape to him from time to time he assured me we were making good progress toward the village of the Clankolites.

I would find it a nomadic village, he said, for the Clankolites roved over the face of the planet to take advantage of the best hunting, and to find the best grazing for their domesticated growsers.

Then he ejaculated a bit of Clankolite profanity. His own cursed growser had run off from him after his fall, instead of standing by as a good beast should.

"But you came," he said, "and your kindness will never be forgotten."

Appreciation is such a little thing, and yet how little of it I had enjoyed in my seventeen years. Only from Bendetti.

AS the day progressed I became more interested in Strong Jaw. His troubles became mine, and when he told me what an unworthy and hateful Clankolite warrior was in danger of marrying his daughter, I shared his indignation.

"But Breath of Clover must choose for herself," he said resignedly, "and she has already given him two faith-gifts."

My thoughts drifted. The love life of Breath of Clover was less important to me at the moment than something I saw skimming over the land like a low swift cloud. It was the space ship.

"We've got to hide," I blurted, jerk-

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ing at Stone Jaw's arms.

"Vultures?" he asked.

"Vultures," I repeated. And from the way he responded I knew that he held a strong respect for some mysterious danger that flew the skies.

"Stealers of women, killers of men," he muttered, and then fell silent.

Later I got around to inquiring whether he had ever seen ships from other planets, and he became quite voluble on the subject. Only a few times in his life had the Clankolites been visited by men from outside worlds. But those times were memorable, for the outsiders brought trinkets and curios and plates of wonderful metals that could be made into hatchets and arrows.

All through the day of walking I was successful in keeping my wings a secret. And all the while I wondered whether it made any difference. *To him, deprived of his eyesight, I was a man.* My talk and my actions won his fullest approval.

Why, then, did I feel any guilt over my deception?

Had I grown to think of myself as inferior?

Bendetti used to warn me about that. The engraved gold button was an emblem he had picked up as a souvenir from a far-off planet. He had given it to me as a proof that men exalt the eagle.

"You have the tenacity and courage that men would like to have," he used to say to me. "But never forget this: you are half eagle, *but you are all man. . . .*"

It was not until that night when I was making camp for Stone Jaw that he told me of his mishap of the previous evening.

By now we were within half a day's hike of his village, and it was my mention of the little black dots on a distant hillside—a herd of domesticated growsers—that evoked his reflections. He still couldn't understand why that stupid growser of his had walked off without him.

"The Clankolite council expected me to make a report today," he said, "on the conditions of the grass lands in the upper valley. Rarely do I make a stupid blunder that costs me a wound."

Then he mutered reflectively, "I still can't understand it. Limbs don't fall from trees unless there is a wind or a quake to shake them down."

"'Did a limb strike you?"

"It knocked me off my mount and I struck my head on a rock. It fell without warning. Not a dead limb but a live one. I've never seen it happen before."

I WAS sorely tempted to tell Stone Jaw exactly what had happened, for now I knew that Flanger's distant gun was the cause of this man's accident. But I clamped my beak shut. My new life must not become entangled with men from Karloora.

Stone Jaw and I feasted around a small fire, which I had made with flints and tinder. He had been delighted with my success at catching game, not realizing that as soon as I had walked out of his hearing I took to my wings. Game was plentiful, and for one of my swiftness and keen eyesight the food problem was not going to be difficult.

My only worry, when I took to the air, was that some of the space ship crew might leap out of hiding. The pursuit was on, I knew, for several times during the day Stone Jaw and I had had to hide from "vultures." And in one instance the ship had settled down within half a mile of us and some of the men had struck off on foot in various directions.

But now it was sunset, and my cock-

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sure sense of freedom was very much with me. It was a justified confidence. The spaces on this moon were vast and I had wings. They would never recapture me.

Sunset brought a happy discovery to Stone Jaw. His deep eyes, peering into the western skies, felt a sensation of light. Though he couldn't separate the three suns in the triangle, he was convinced his sight was returning.

"You may leave me, even now," he said.

But a minute later he tripped over a root and sprawled to the ground. I decided I could not leave him yet, and he welcomed my decision.

Our night's lodging was in a cave that was familiar to him. He went to sleep mumbling funny Clankolite phrases that were meant as words of thanks and vows of eternal friendship.

Something awakened me in the night. I sprang up, listening for sounds outside the cave. I was certain I had heard a prowler.

There it came again, the heavy stomp-stomp-stomp of an approaching animal.

I moved warily toward the cave entrance, a jagged arch of black against the deep purple sky. I crowded to the left wall, and looked out upon the full moon setting in the west. The night was almost spent.

Stomp-stomp-stomp. It seemed to be coming right up to the cave. Then it trudged to a stop, and I could hear its slow rhythmic breathing.

"A growser," I kept saying to myself. "A growser wandering through the night."

I WAS curious to take a look at the beast. A quick flight out into the moonlight would do the trick. Stone Jaw was sound asleep—and perfectly safe. The entrance of the cave was too small to admit any beast that was much larger than a man. Besides, I would keep watch during my flight.

I padded silently toward the opening and was just on the point of taking off when I heard the voice.

"Whooooo. . . . Father. . . . Are you there? . . . Whooooo. . . . Are you there, Stone Jaw? . . . It's your daughter. . . . It's Breath of Clover. . . ."

My wings went rigid like two slabs of stone. I brushed the tips of them against the left wall as I crowded back into the cave. Before me, silhouetted against the moon, was the rarest picture I had ever looked upon.

And the strangest study in contrasts. An ugly beast. A beautiful girl. Both outlined against the fast disappearing moon.

CHAPTER VI

THE beast reminded me of pictures I had once seen in a book of interplanetary natural history—a creature with legs as stocky as tree trunks and thick scales over its back that reflected the moonlight like plates of metal.

The features of its head were indistinct, but there was a hint of intelligence and brutal will in the high arch of its neck.

The girl, who had been sitting astride its back, swung down to the ground with an ease and grace that made me sure she was very young—not more than fifteen or sixteen, I guessed—though the contours of her body bespoke perfectly developed young womanhood. The ribbons that clothed her were fluttering in the breeze.

She was strikingly beautiful. My own emotions I will not attempt to describe. But I will say that no *man* could have looked upon her without catching his breath.

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"Father. . . . Stone Jaw. . . . Are you there?"

She moved toward the cave entrance with a stride that was at once free and bold, yet wary.

I moved back in the shadows and whispered to Stone Jaw. "Someone is calling you."

The old fellow was still asleep. I tapped his arm. He roused up and began muttering dreamily. Then her voice came again, close and intimate, echoed within the cave. Its dialect was that of Stone Jaw's, its tone that of a child, half expectant, half afraid. Stone Jaw clambered to his feet. I brushed past him in the darkness, and I could guess the look of bewilderment that must have lined his sleepy face.

"Breath of Clover? Is that you?"

"Oh, father, you *are* here! I've found you!" The girl gave a squeal of delight. I could hear the light flapping of her ribbon-like garments as she came running into the cave.

"What are you doing here, child?"

"Looking for you."

"How did you know to come here?"

"I've been looking everywhere, night and day. Everybody has been looking. We thought you were lost—maybe dead."

STONE JAW gave a snort of disgust. "I don't get lost."

"But you said you would return days ago. The tribe was waiting for your report. Did anything happen? Were you in trouble? Great winds, what shaggy whiskers you have. You must look like a sheep. Have you no fire so I can see you? Come out into the moonlight."

"Ugh?" the old hunter muttered in surprise. "Isn't it morning yet?"

"Not yet. Can't you see? . . . *Can't you?*" The girl's excited, joyful voice suddenly broke in horror. "Father, what's the matter?"

"I'll be all right, Clover. I had a fall, and things went black. But Fire Jump is here taking care of me. He's here now—aren't you, Fire Jump?"

"I'm here," I replied, nestling back in a corner uncomfortably. The girl gave a little frightened gasp.

"Fire Jump has been leading me back," the old hunter continued. "Soon after this dawn we would have reached the village. But it was good of you to come searching the caves."

The girl whispered. This Fire Jump —who was he, where did he come from, where was he going, why should he be leading Stone Jaw back to the village? Was he not up to some mischief?

Before Stone Jaw could answer I broke into their confidential talk with, "Now that your daughter has come, you will not need me. I shall leave."

"Wait," said Stone Jaw. "Breath of Clover doesn't know you, but she means no harm. It must soon be morning. If my tribesmen are looking for me, I must show them the man who has cared for my life. You will be my guest, honored at my feasting."

Again he repeated some of the funny Clankolite expressions of gratitude. It was not easy for me to rush away. But I was not going to let daylight catch me here with a man whose sight was returning, and his daughter with two good eyes to see me for what I was.

"If my daughter could know you as I do," Stone Jaw was saying, "she would double the strength of my invitation."

He said more along this line, and the girl's words began to soften toward me, as if she esteemed me as some one of noble status. And I, growing more uncomfortable every minute, looked to the door of the cave.

THIN streaks of gray light entered from the jagged archway, but most

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of the light was blocked out. The growser had come up and blocked the entrance with his massive shoulder. My hopes fell. The job of escaping these Clankolite friends was going to be more complicated than I had anticipated.

Stone Jaw was still lauding me and his extravagant words embarrassed Breath of Clover.

"If Clover knew how brave and strong you are, she would be giving her *faith-gifts* to you."

"Stone Jaw, an ax through your noisy words," the girl scolded impetuously. This talk had gone beyond her patience. Faith-gifts, as I had learned through previous conversations with the old hunter, had to do with Clankolite rituals of courtship—a bestowing of carved stones or trinkets or shoes of fur. "My faith-gifts," she added, "go to Flint Fingers. What would he think if I gave faith-gifts to strangers with such weird names as Fire Jump?"

"He would be as mad as a stung growser," Stone Jaw said bluntly.

"Mad enough to kill," said Breath of Clover. "So I will keep my favors. I will give them to Flint Fingers."

"Can there be no better men than Flint Fingers?"

"There are none so young who have killed so many vultures," said Breath of Clover, breathing hard with anger and pride.

The old hunter picked up the challenge sharply. I tried to make out the outlines of his face to catch his expression, but the cave was still steeped in darkness.

"I'll wager that Fire Jump," he said, "has killed more vultures than your Flint Fingers. How many, Fire Jump?"

"I have no answer," I said.

"There, he has no achievements," said the girl.

"He has many," her father barked. "But he makes less noise about them than your Flint Fingers. See. He is saying nothing. But if he wanted to, he could tell you how he is the fastest, highest jumper of all men. He can out-jump any fire. That's why his name is Fire Jump."

There was a silence that bore testimony to the fact that Breath of Clover was deeply impressed.

"Fire Jump," she said, "where are you?"

"Here."

"Is it true that you can out-jump any fire?" Her voice came closer to me. Then her hand, reaching out in the darkness, touched my arm. She was trying to see me, but her eyes couldn't penetrate the dark like mine.

"Yes," I said, "it is true."

"Sometime will you show me how high and how swift you can jump?"

"Perhaps, sometime."

"Today," said Breath of Clover. With childlike excitement she clutched the powerful biceps of my left arm with both her hands. "Today when we bring father back to the village, the men will build the tallest fire that can be built and you shall jump over it?"

"Yes?"

"Are you handsome?" Her hands moved up over my shoulder and I knew she intended touching my face. I caught her wrists and thrust her aside. I stepped past her and strode toward the front of the cave.

A THIN crack of pink morning light sifted in over the scaled back of the growser that blocked my path. I padded toward the creature on the run, crowding the right wall of the cave, hoping Breath of Clover's eyes would not catch me.

"Fire Jump!" she cried. "Why are you going?"

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"I can't tell you," I shouted back, a rasping squawk in my voice. I kicked out at the barrier of crusty scales. The big beast moved lazily, and a wide gap was left between the arch of the cave and the slope of the growser's neck.

But not wide enough for me to emerge without running the risk of getting a wing crushed. Only wide enough for a shaft of light to flood in on me.

"Vulture!" The girl's scream rang through the cave. *"Father, he's a vulture. Don't let him get me! Ooooh!"*

CHAPTER VII

THAT hideous cry sent cold chills through me. Instantly my wings were ready. Instantly the big beast that blocked the doorway lumbered around, snorting and pawing the earth.

"Get him, growser! He's a vulture! Ooooh!"

The girl was crazy with terror. I couldn't stand that wild screaming. I bounded out of the cave, leaping over the growser as he turned, and flapped out into the air.

So swift was my take-off that I was winging away before I knew it. The girl's cry faded like a retreating whistle in my ears.

I circled high, still hearing the muffled screaming from within the cave, still tingling to my talons with the awfulness of what I had done.

Below me the ugly head of the dragon-like monster was waggling brutally as his high arched neck whipped from side to side. That word "vulture" had meant something deadly, and the growser knew it. He was striking at the air like a poison snake.

My arm was wet, and I realized that there was something strange about it. It was wet from being scraped by the growser's teeth. That's how close the beast had come to snapping me when I flew by him. What would have happened if I had stayed in the cave?

But I wouldn't have, for in that moment of descending danger my eagle instincts had taken full possession of me.

So that was a growser! And this sickening sweetish odor on my arm was growser saliva.

Now Breath of Clover emerged from the cave leading her father. There was an awful agony on the old man's whiskery face. I swooped down to catch a better view, but the girl screamed and Stone Jaw struck out at the air blindly. His sightless days had fixed some habits of helplessness on him.

But soon he was lifting his head, trying to see where the girl was pointing—which was up at me. His body grew rigid, his eyebrows lifted, his fingers spread over his forehead as if he were enduring some great pain.

"Don't let him get us, growser," the girl was crying.

Stone Jaw pushed her aside. He gazed up at me and called, "I can *see* you."

His voice trembled, fraught by the terrible shock, and yet there was a glory in his awesome tone. He could see me!

I LET myself down to a bit of ledge, a safe resting place from which to look down upon them—safe as long as that growser didn't undertake a charge up the side of the cliff. With a show of self control, Breath of Clover turned her attention to the animal and commanded its obedience. There I was. It must not take its eyes off me.

The absurdity of it. She was afraid of me. But she was the fearless master of that four-ton jungle critter with vast jaws and knife-blade teeth. It

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was her obedient beast of burden, her protector.

In fact, she would have been quite happy if it had chopped my wings in two and turned my body into growser cud—which it had barely failed to do, owing to the fact that I was quick on the jump.

"Keep your eyes on him, growser." She patted the creature on the shoulder, somewhat nervously, to be sure; but she feared him less than if he had been a mouse.

But it was obvious that she was mortally afraid of me. To see me standing up here in the morning light, to see that I was mostly a man, with only the wings and head and feet of an eagle, didn't banish her terror of me in the least.

If she had only known me—

My thoughts whirled back to Magistrate Bendetti.

The magistrate had been right, of course. He would not have spent day after day pounding a principle into my head if he had not been sure I would need it. All strangers, he had told me, were bound to look upon me with fear and suspicion. I must make up my mind to endure it. I must be terribly careful never to intimidate anyone.

But above all, I must never cross the path of any girl or woman.

That, Bendetti had said, must be my first rule of conduct—always—always.

And yet there was more to this girl's insane fear than simply the shock of finding she had been making friends with a freak. What was it?

What was it that Stone Jaw had said about the vultures? They kill men. They *steal* women.

STONE JAW'S woeful eyes were still looking up at me.

"Are you Fire Jump?" he called.

"Yes," I said. "But I'm leaving you now. I won't disturb you again."

"Where did you come from?"

"From Karloora."

"Karloora! Why did you come here?"

"They brought me to see if I could fly."

"Who brought you?"

"My owner—Flanger—a man like yourself—only very different. I mean, he was a man that I hated. He was the man who caused me to be made this way."

"Caused you to be *made?*"

"Yes . . . Can you see my wings, my eagle's head, my talons? I'm no creature of nature. I'm an experiment in science. Do you know what science is? I'm what happened when some very smart men meddled with different forms of life, playing jokes on unborn babies and eagles to create me . . . Why are you looking at me so strangely?"

Stone Jaw was slow to answer. His manner was incredulous.

"Do you believe that?"

"But it's true," I said.

Whether my declaration made any impression upon him I do not know, but I'm certain it had no effect upon Breath of Clover. She had leaped to the back of the growser during our conversation, as if to guarantee her safety from any further dealings with me. Then some sounds in the distance had attracted her attention.

She rose to stand like a golden brown statue mounted on the growser's back, peering across toward the shafts of sunlight down the valley. As the heavy hoofs of a second growser sounded along the hillside she began waving her hand in an excited greeting.

"Flint Fingers! Hurry!" she cried, and her childish voice was shrill enough to carry against the galloping hoofs. "Hurreeee!"

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Stone Jaw silenced her and went on questioning me. His intent manner was foreboding. Now that he could see me, he and I were both different. His stony manner made him seem a stranger.

Why, he asked, did my owner bring me here. Then, had I never flown before? And why had I determined to break away? Why should I choose this moon, of all places, to be my new home?

"Because I can fly here. The gravity—do you understand? I am freer. I have more power. But then I had no choice about coming. They forced me to do that. My choice was to break away from them."

"Have they gone back, Fire Jump?" He called me by name! My heart pounded with a hope that our friendship still held.

"They have not gone back," I said. "Each day that you and I walked, I was in danger of being recaptured. It was not vultures that flew over us, it was the Karloora space ship."

"Your story is very strange," said Stone Jaw. "Much stranger than you know."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you *are* a vulture."

MY BRAIN swam with dizziness. I breathed slowly, deeply, yet with extraordinary effort. I was fighting off a passion to drop down and seize Stone Jaw by the throat and shake him until he swallowed the word.

"You are wrong, Stone Jaw!" I squalled, tossing my head defiantly. "But we understand each other now. You've seen me. You're taking back all those pledges of friendship. All right. That's all gone. The slate is clean."

"Wait! I didn't say that, Fire Jump—"

He kept on with his shouting, but I swept off into the morning sky far out of hearing.

I glanced back to see Breath of Clover persuading him to get on the growser, and together they rode to the bend of the stream a short distance away. The other growser had stopped for water, and one of its two riders was beckoning to Breath of Clover to come meet him.

What did I care if the girl and her young warrior friend were about to meet? What did I care if she told him she had narrowly escaped being seized by *me?*

Did it make any difference to me that his name was Flint Fingers and that he was an expert killer of vultures?

Why should it? I cared nothing for men. My bitter vow was to break clean from them. The sunlight was good up here—and the air—and the freedom! This was my world, and it felt right to my wings.

Was I not the most lordly creature of this planet? What had I to do with those poor silly creatures who were doomed to stick to the ground? I could despise them, ignore them.

Or could I?

My human curiosity pulled me back down toward the line of trees that banked the stream. I skimmed over them almost silently; I was getting cleverer at this art of flying.

I alighted on a dead limb. The two parties of growser riders were coming together down there below me, at a point where the trail narrowed between the river and the cliff. As long as I was not seen this limb was a box seat from which to watch the show.

Stone Jaw's face was hard, and I knew a turmoil filled his brain.

BREATH OF CLOVER, riding ahead of him, had regained her poise.

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She was a beautiful, graceful creature, and the eagerness in her eyes as she rode up to meet her young warrior was plain to see. Though still a trifle nervous from her recent shock, she evidently felt secure, now that there were two growsers to keep watch for any return of danger.

But the growsers didn't see me. Neither could they smell me, apparently, though my hiding place was so close to the trail that I could have dropped a leaf on the second growser as it passed under me.

It was as handsome a beast as the first. Its fierce brutal head rode high and gleamed with bluish tints as the sunshine struck it. Its arched neck was a brilliant red, shifting in hues as it turned in the light.

The tall young man, Flint Fingers, who sat astride this glorious mount was likewise a handsome creature, but I didn't like him. He and the dragon had the same appeal for me. Both of them somehow reminded me of Tokel's arrogant swagger, his ready brutality.

The other occupant of this beast was almost hidden from sight. She was clinging to the growser's tail, ducking her head down as if she were playing stowaway. She was a muddy unkempt urchin of fourteen or fifteen, as nearly as I could guess. Obviously she had been dragged in the dust.

Breath of Clover did not appear to notice her at first.

"Flint Fingers!" Clover greeted, smiling eagerly. "How did you find me?"

"With my sharp eyes." Flint Fingers laughed out of the side of his mouth. "I can follow your trail as easy as the river follows its bed. So you found your father at last."

"I told you yesterday," Breath of Clover said, "that we should come out to these cliffs. I remembered—"

Breath of Clover broke off. She leaned to one side to gaze at the second passenger. Meanwhile Flint Fingers and Stone Jaw exchanged blunt greetings, and the young warrior began to admonish the older man over the trouble had caused. All of this searching could have been avoided, Flint Fingers said, if Stone Jaw had simply climbed to a high hill and started a fire signal.

"My sharp eyes would have caught it," Flint Fingers declared. "I have the sharpest eyes in the valley."

"Who's with you?" Breath of Clover asked.

"No one," said Flint Fingers.

"There's someone back there—"

Flint Fingers spun around as if a whirlwind had lifted him.

The impish creature back of him leaped off the growser's tail laughing like a demon. She waggled her head from side to side and swung her arms in teasing gestures.

"Hu-hu-hu! The sharpest eyes in the valley!" she cackled.

Flint Fingers reddened. "Tangles! What are you doing here?"

"Taking a ride with you."

"Get away, you silly little gob of mud. I ought to jerk the tangled hair off your head. I ought to—"

"I dare you to do it!" the taunting girl flung back at him.

FLINT FINGERS jumped at the challenge. He was evidently the sort of proud young hothead who would jump at any challenge, and the wail of Breath of Clover only fanned the flames of his temper.

"It's only Tangles. She's harmless." Breath of Clover's words went unheeded. Her young warrior bounded to the ground and started chasing the ragged, tangle-haired girl.

Her dirty bare feet were nimble. She

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skipped ahead of him and leaped up a tier of rocks. He followed, muttering darkly that he would teach her to play such tricks.

"Let her alone," Breath of Clover cried, tagging after them.

"I'll not let her alone," Flint Fingers swore. "I've warned her to keep away from me, the dirty-faced little worm. I'll teach her—*Stop it!* If you throw another rock I'll club you—"

"Why don't you do it?" The swift-footed girl could hurl stones and taunts with equal vigor, and throw in a scornful laugh for good measure. Flint Fingers was boiling mad.

He chased her along the rocks, back and forth under perch. Suddenly he had her trapped on a bit of cliff above him and he picked up a club. He started to climb up. She kicked at him. He drew himself up only far enough to swing the club at her. He began beating her feet.

She didn't cry out. She tried kicking, but her feet were taking a drubbing.

It was Breath of Clover who screamed, trying to stop it. "Don't, Flint! You'll make her fall! Don't!"

The girl's feet were already bleeding. But no cries from Breath of Clover or Stone Jaw had any control over the young warrior. His pride had been injured. That dirty faced little practical joker called Tangles was going to pay for what she had done.

Before I thought, I swooped down.

Flint Fingers didn't hear me coming. Breath of Clover screamed, but that meant nothing to him. I was almost on him before his eyes jerked up at me. The color went out of his pinkish-bronzed face.

My right talon dug into his hair and kicked backward in the split second that I hovered over him. A slight kick, but enough. Flint Fingers went rolling down the stony cliff.

I arched back into the air and settled proudly on my perch.

FLINT FINGERS scrambled to his feet almost immediately. I had expected that, for his fall hadn't been dangerous. And I wasn't surprised that he shook his fist at me and gave me a round of Clankolite cursing.

Neither was I surprised that the beautiful Breath of Clover ran to her father, crying like the terrified child she was, and that they mounted their growser, who was now looking hungrily in my direction.

But I confess that I was surprised by the words of that tangle-haired impish girl on the ledge, after what I had done to befriend her. Her dark squinty eyes froze on me with an undecipherable stare and she gasped, "Vulture! . . . Vulture!"

But it gratified me to observe that she didn't run, and she didn't scream. If anything, there was a hint of admiration in her look of breathless amazement.

However there were six pairs of eyes upon me, not neglecting those of the two growsers, and it didn't become me to become too much fascinated by any one pair.

Flint Fingers, I observed, had regained his bravado, had remounted his charger, and was now in the process of fishing some weapons out of a supply sack.

"Wait, Flint Fingers, wait!" This harsh muttering came from Stone Jaw.

But Flint Fingers was a law unto himself, as I have noted before. He began shooting arrows for me. I didn't like it. It was easy enough to dodge the arrows, but I didn't care for any more of Flint Fingers' company. I gave a squawkish laugh and sprang into the air to circle high into the morning sky.

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And that might have been the end. I had had enough of men, whether from Karloora or this moon. It was time for me to go my own way. But one thing drew me back.

As I looked down from the clouds and saw that the surly young warrior refused to let the dirty-face girl ride back to the village—as I watched her limping along on her sore feet, unable to keep up with the procession—I spiralled back toward the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS Flint Fingers, not Stone Jaw or his daughter, who had forced Tangles to walk. Now they were on out of sight and she was alone.

She was a pitiful thing, limping along the dusty rocky trail, crying and swearing and calling down the wrath of the Clankolite spirits on Flint Fingers and all his kinfolks.

I followed along after. I was sure she would fall by the wayside. But she tottered on until she came to a small brook. She dropped down into the sluggish waters and drank and bathed at the same time. That bed of wet sand might have been a pallet of feathers, the way she relaxed in it.

She hadn't bothered to remove any clothing. Like Breath of Clover, she was dressed in a tight-fitting garment that appeared to be endless wrappings of coarse ribbons. But what a contrast. Breath of Clover's costume had been neat, almost stylish. This girl's wrappings were dirt and rags.

Her hair, too, was in sad disarray. As she wallowed in the stream and the water oozed around the back of her head, her unkempt tresses became a mop rag.

At first I wasn't sure whether she knew I had followed. But as I swooped across to a tree that cast a shadow beside her, she scrambled to her knees and reached for a stone.

Her lips and eyes were tight with suspicion. She was watching my every move. Hers was a fighting face—though it might have been a pretty face, if it hadn't been streaked with lines of tension—and dirt. With her, belligerence was plainly a habit. She lived in a world full of enemies.

"My name is Fire Jump," I called down to her. Her arms jerked with surprise. She hardly knew whether to believe her own ears. But I went on talking. "You shouldn't be afraid of *me*. I'm not Flint Fingers. I'm Fire Jump. Who are you?"

She began biting her lips. She didn't intend to answer me. So I answered myself. "Your name is Tangles, isn't it? I heard them call you that."

She began to sniffle and sob.

"What are you crying about, Tangles? Do your feet hurt? Aren't you going to thank me for making Flint Fingers stop?"

She rubbed her wet fist across her face and stopped crying. Again she was hard with suspicion.

"I know how you feel," I called down to her.

IT TOOK several minutes of talking before I gained ground. And no wonder. She was certain I was intent on plunging down to capture her, and was only killing time.

"We are alike, you and I," I said. "I've been mistreated too. But I've run away. No one can hurt me now. Why don't you run away?"

"I've got no one to run away from," she said sulkily.

"What about your family? What about your village?"

"No family. No village. Nobody."

"Don't you live with the same people as Stone Jaw and his daughter? You're

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a Clankolite, aren't you?"

"Of course," she said. "But I drift from one village to another. Nobody cares. I go where I please. I'll hang around some family until they push me out. Then I go on to another."

"Do you ever go hungry?"

"Why should I? I can steal, can't I? Besides, I can hunt. Sometimes I follow the boys when they go hunting. But they don't like me. I'm always getting in fights. Everybody hates me. That's because I always make trouble."

"Why do you do it?"

"Why not?" she said sullenly. "I like to fight."

"I do too," I said, "if there's something to fight for. But I don't like to go around making trouble."

She gave a cynical sniff, looking up at me skeptically. "Then what are you doing around here bothering me?"

"You need help, Tangles, after that beating you took. You can hardly walk. The darkness will catch you before you can get anywhere. But I could help you."

"How?"

"Pick you up and fly over the hills to wherever you live. You could be back to the closest village right away."

I tried to smile, and some of my old trainers might have recognized the drawn corners of my beak as an expression of a pleasant humor. But Tangles didn't. As she watched me, perched comfortably at the top of the tree, her scowl deepened. She was lying on her stomach, her elbows in the sand, her bruised feet in the glassy water. The stone—her weapon—lay within reach.

"I don't trust you," she said slowly. "I'll admit you're not like the other vultures. You talk better. I've heard them—captured ones—and they snarl and squawk and blurt. Their words aren't much better than the grunts of beasts. But you talk as well as a Clankolite. Yes, even better. . . . But I don't trust you."

"Why not?"

"Because you're a vulture. And I know vultures. They flew away with my mother. I was just old enough to remember."

"YOU'RE wrong about me," I said, feeling the warmth of anger race through my feathered neck. "I came from Karloora. I was *made* there. Someone decided to create a freak. I'm it."

"You're a vulture."

"I'm not. I've never seen a vulture. I've just come to this Blue Moon. But nobody believes me."

"You're a good talker," Tangles said. "I wish I could lie like you do."

"Look, Tangles," I said. "Do you see this badge?"

I turned the gold engraved button so that it flashed sunlight in her eyes.

"What about it?"

"It came from Karloora," I said. "That proves I'm telling the truth. I'm not a creature of this Blue Moon. You can't match this emblem on the Blue Moon."

"It proves nothing," she said stubbornly. "I have a coin that came from Karloora, but *I* never came from there."

"Show me your coin," I said skeptically.

She drew a kerchief out of her clothes and untied a knot in the corner. My head bent forward and turned from side to side. I was too far away to be sure the coin was genuine, but my eagle eyes were almost convinced. It looked like a Karloora coin.

"Where did you get that?" I snapped.

"You would like to know, wouldn't you, Fire Jump? But you never will. . . . *Stay where you are!*"

I sprang from my perch without

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warning, and the girl leaped to her feet. She was alert to danger, all right. My words hadn't changed that. She grabbed the rock with one hand, thrusting the treasure of her kerchief into the breast of the ragged garment with the other.

But my sudden leap had nothing to do with her. I was winging full speed away. Then a wide patch of blue shadow floated over her. She turned sharply and saw the passing space ship.

It was the Labazoff convertible. Less than a hundred yards beyond the stream it floated down to a landing. I had flown at the first sight of it.

My wings were a stroke ahead of my wits. But in a flash I swept down and sped back toward Tangles. She was in a panic. She hurled rocks at me so fast I had to dodge in flight. But I fluttered to a stop and squawked at her with a sharp tongue.

"That's a Karloora ship. They're after me. Come on."

"They can have you." she snapped.

"They're a tough crowd. Let me take you out of here—"

"Get away, you vulture. I'll kill you. I'll kill you."

"Come on—quick."

"I won't."

The stones began to fly again, so I sped away. There was no time to say more, and no use. The girl was a fool.

THE Karloora men had seen me. It was all chance, but I had played my luck too far, and chance could be my undoing. I glanced back at the perch I had occupied. Yes, I had been perfectly silhouetted against the northern sky. Some of the men were piling out of the parked ship, racing over toward the stream, waving their disint guns.

Let them come. I was already half a mile out of their range, gaining altitude with every stroke. Did they think they could capture me? I had wings. Those poor silly humans had to run around on the ground. It was a farce, their trying to threaten me. into subjection with guns. I would be worth nothing to them dead. And I was just as determined never to be taken alive by them as Tangles was not to be taken alive by me.

But in that moment something happened that tied my heart into knots. The Labazoff convertible, slid off the ground and took to the air, making a graceful turn.

It turned toward me. I was being pursued by the ship! What would the odds be now?

It skimmed along like a light cloud in a swift current of air. I raced toward the distant cliffs.

But I saw I would never reach them. This race called for new tactics. I nose dived for the ground as hard and fast as I could go. If only the gravity were stronger! It was so light it seemed no help at all.

I shot down and the space ship skimmed over me. I darted back. The ship began to turn. I headed straight down. Again the ship slid over me—this time so close that I could see the pilot's face at the window. Twice more I switched directions as the big clumsy pursuer sought to keep sight of me. The low levels were my way out. I sped for the trees, and shot back toward the stream where I had left the tangle-haired girl.

A mile upstream from where I had left her I knew it was time to get down —*clear down*—out of sight. For if the ship succeeded in flying over me at this low elevation, I could be trapped in a shower bath of disint fire. Unless I rushed through it, I'd be taken alive.

The one chance, I saw, on first thought, was to hide under the surface

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of the water.

But a backward glance showed me that I was concealed from view, at the moment. Before the ship showed over the tree tops there was time to act.

I thought of Tangles and her rocks. I swooped to the bank of the lazy brook, hovered for an instant while my right talon closed over a stone, then hurled it with precision. It skimmed over the mud, cutting a sharp line, and plunged into the mirror of water.

IN A FLASH I winged for the thickets, flying so low that I could have snatched grass with my hands. And a moment later I was bounding along on my talons with my wings folded close behind me.

This was perilous, deserting my wings for my feet. But these tree trunks were my friends. I was in far less danger of being seen if I contracted to my wingless size. I crept along like a wild animal eluding a hunter.

Now I froze behind the trunk of a tree. The space ship was following as closely over the stream as it dared, almost brushing the tree tops. It approached the point where the water had been roiled by the rock, then it suddenly swerved toward a clearing and landed.

Now there were shouts of directions back and forth between the men who had been unloaded farther downstream and those who poured out of the ship. At last they thought they had me cornered. I was hiding *in* the stream, they said.

Almost immediately the space ship lifted again, as if anticipating that I would hear and take to the air.

But I kept my wings folded, and hiked doggedly upstream, slowly but surely, keeping in the shelter of the thicket, and they never saw me. I chuckled, satisfied with my discovery. Here was a new advantage that went with wings; the power to refrain from using them if they couldn't win the race.

From a well concealed observation post two miles beyond, I watched the men spend the rest of the day searching, plying back and forth in the big ship, trying in vain to pick up my trail. Many times they returned to the place where I seemed to have dragged a talon in the mud while plunging for the stream.

Was Flanger with them? At no time during the chase had I seen anyone who remotely resembled him.

And when the ship finally floated away in the evening, I could only wonder whether all of its men were aboard or whether some had been left hiding by the brook to trap me.

Indeed, it looked very much like a trap.

Tangles was still nearby, stationed on a promontory a short distance above the wooded brook. I flew closer and circled within a hundred yards of her.

She was watching me, calling to me, beckoning me to come.

Would I fly back to her, only to find myself suddenly surrounded? Were Flanger's men hiding on that promontory?

The answer to my questions came in a double-dose of decisive actions. As I was gazing toward Tangles silhouetted against the triangle of suns, the space ship shot across the horizon at high speed and rocketed off into the sky bound for Karloora.

I drew a deep breath. The chase was over. Flanger's men had bowed down to the fact that I was free.

I looked back to Tangles. Against the bright western sky she might have been a tree stump, her waving arm a broken limb. The sight of the space ship rocketing away had momentarily hypnotized her.

Then came the real violence. A huge bird sailed down out of the sunlight

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toward the promontory where she stood. It slacked its speed as it approached her. She didn't see it coming.

As it swept down upon her it reached out—*with a pair of arms!* It snatched her up and flew off with her.

CHAPTER IX

LIKE a stream of fire from a disint gun I was off into the air.

Never had my eagle instincts carried me into action with a swifter overriding of my human will. From now on, it seemed, my wings would think for me, and I could ponder their decision while flying.

I can't describe the sweet satisfaction that filled me as I looked down and saw the ground scooting away beneath me—or as I looked ahead and saw the big bird growing bigger. I was overtaking it. Here was a race of wings against wings.

Tangles hadn't screamed. Nor was she crying as I almost caught up with her. She was simply scared sick. The fading sunlight showed her face to be chalk-white beneath the dirt streaks.

I swallowed hard. It would be the easiest thing in the world for that vulture to drop her. Vulture. Vulture. Vulture. The word stuck in my throat.

Vulture! He was no more nor less than an eagle man—*exactly like me.*

I was within a few yards of him, now, and he looked back to see me coming. His arms clutched the scared girl like heavy vines stiffening around a willowy tree. His wings flapped hard against the air and he surged away from me.

But I hadn't begun to try my speed. The advantage was all mine. I had no burden.

I could see anger and dismay in the tightening of his beak and the flash of his eyes as he looked back at me. I glared at him with a fighting smile. My talons itched to get at him.

Tangles was watching me now. With each flap of the vulture's wings I could glimpse her head and shoulders hanging limply outside the crook of his right arm.

She nodded to me eagerly as I came closer. That was a thrill. For once no one was screaming "Vulture!" at me. That look of confidence from her frightened eyes was fresh power to my muscles. I'd have flown around the moon for her.

Her captor put on one hard burst of speed after another. How far would he go? And where? Maybe my boast that I would fly clear around the moon for her was going to be put to the test.

Where were we now? I glanced back and saw the whole wide valley spreading back of me. On the horizon, miles to the north, the distant fires of Clankolite villages wavered in the twilight like a row of tiny stars. Ahead of our chase were the jagged purple mountains that I had seen on the day of my arrival.

THIS land to the south was new territory to me. But not to the creature I pursued. Again I was within a few yards of overtaking him.

The safest thing would have been to follow along until he alighted and placed Tangles on the ground. If I tried to tackle him in the air, there was no telling what might happen to Tangles.

But the daylight was passing. I wouldn't dare hazard a fight in the dark with an unknown enemy in an unknown land. Much less, an air fight.

He was flagging. My time was at hand.

I plunged forward, turning myself in the air so that I was flying on my back. I rushed under the vulture with such fury that before he could start

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kicking me my arms locked around the girl's body.

From that moment it was a fight of talons.

I locked my wings behind me and became dead weight, the same as Tangles. The vulture's wings fought the air with the burden of both of us. He was gasping for breath.

Tangles rolled forward, throwing her weight against my shoulders and pressing her knees against my right side. Luckily she was out of the way of the kicking talons; her bruised feet would have been torn to shreds.

Down—down—down we went. As we fell we began to turn. The massive black shadows of the foothills were gyrating beneath us. We were dead-locked, and neither of us would spread his wings to catch our fall.

But now my adversary was getting the worst of the vicious kicking battle. Suddenly I dared a strategy that was too much for him. Clinging to Tangles with only one arm I thrust my fingers at his feathered throat. My clutch tightened with the power of a machine. He gulped. I fought harder. His arms began to slip.

The shadows were swirling up at us swiftly with their promise of sudden death. Tangles saw, and I heard the slight gurgle of her voice as she repressed a cry.

Then her captor's arms slipped off, just as my wings spread to catch our fall. We arched up into the air, and as he fell away from us I saw that his eyes were closed. My vise on his throat had done it.

Whether he was dead or only half-dead as he plummeted down I do not know. But a moment later his body crashed against the rocks below us. He lay still.

We flew past him three times to make sure there was no life left in him.

If there had been—

Well, now that I was living by my wings I had a new, special feeling about such things. I was sure that if he had been only half-dead, lying there with broken wings, he would have preferred a death of mercy. . . .

WE FLEW northward through the darkening sky—Tangles and I. The girl looked up at me questioningly. I drifted at an easy, lazy pace. My speed was spent.

It seemed a long time before we came within sight of that long row of shimmering dots of lights on the valley horizon.

Tangles was so silent she might have been asleep. But from time to time her head turned against my left arm and I knew she was peering off to the north to make sure I was taking her back. When she finally saw the pin-points of lights that were the far-off Clankolite village, she relaxed in my arms and for an hour's flying she did sleep.

By the time she awoke, Karloora, the Blue Moon's moon, was casting its mellow creamy light upon us.

This was a flight to remember. The moon lent a touch of beauty to everything—the wooded valley over which we were sailing, the bank of clouds rising in the west, even the ragged rebellious little figure in my arms. Her hair was blowing in the wind; the ribbons of her costume were flapping, her bruised dirty knees were two dots of reflected moonlight resting on the crook of my right arm.

"Are your feet bleeding, Fire Jump?" she asked abruptly.

"They were. They're feeling better now."

"We must stop by the brook and rest, Fire Jump," Tangles said. "You'll grow faint from loss of blood."

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"I can take you to the nearest village before I rest," I said.

"No. The brook first. I'm sure you're thirsty."

We flew down to the same pool where Tangles had bathed and wallowed in the sand earlier in the day. While I soaked my bruised talons she gathered some fruits from a tree that had provided her dinner a few hours before.

To me there was something at once weird and pleasurable in the turn this night had taken. Its terrors were gone, now. And though the storm clouds were piling high in the west, flinging magic fingers of light up into the sky, there was nothing about the weather to engender any fears. A spirit of deep contentment was upon me.

Part of it was my new confidence. My owners had gone back to Karloora without me. I was my own master. My wings had been put to the test against the wings of a vulture—or should I say *another* vulture—and I had fought a victorious fight.

But more than this, I had won confidence and appreciation from Tangles.

SHE was only a ragged unkempt child of nature, a mischievous scamp of a girl. But she recognized that I—an eagle man—had become her friend.

It was fascinating to listen to her excited, scatterbrained talk. She had never realized until the last few hours that she was outgrowing her rough-and-tumble girlhood and about to become a young woman. But this night's adventure had started her to thinking seriously about herself.

"The vultures come and steal women to be their wives," she said between mouthfuls of food. Her jaws were working excitedly. "They never came after me before. I knew they might—some day when I got older—but I was always sure that when the time came I'd be able to fight them off with rocks."

"Did you see this one coming?"

"Oooh, no," she gasped. "I was up there on the hill waving at you—"

"What for?"

"To tell you it was all right to come back. You see, I knew the Karloora men had quit looking for you. I heard them talking. And I knew it was true, what you'd said about coming from Karloora. So I was waving. Then I stopped to watch the ship jump off into the sky—and the next thing I knew *I* was sailing off in the sky myself."

"Were you scared?"

Her squinty little eyes grew big, glistening with moonlight.

"I almost couldn't breathe, I was so scared," she said. "What made it puzzling was I'd been talking with you all day. And this bird was so *different*. I tried to argue with him, and he gave such an ugly beastly squawk—"

She shuddered. Again the strangeness of her confidence sent a new warmth flooding through my chest. For I knew that *to the eye* there had been very little difference between that vulture and me.

But here was some one who saw me not as I *looked*, but as I acted.

Had Stone Jaw been able to do as much? I thought not.

And his daughter? Her terror had blinded her. And yet I could credit Breath of Clover with a little of the same trait. She hadn't overlooked the harsh actions of Flint Fingers. His striking self-importance hadn't blinded her to his brutal actions against the tangle-haired girl.

"Where would the vulture have taken you?" I asked, as I studied Tangles' wistful face.

"All the way to the mountains. That's where the vultures live."

"You'd have had a long hike back."

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Tangles shook her head. "The stolen women never come back. It's too far, and there are too many forest animals."

"Can't the Clankolites put a stop to this stealing?"

"They've tried. The war goes on almost constantly. But our arrows can't catch the fastest vultures—just like Flint Fingers couldn't shoot you—"

The girl broke off, glancing up as if wondering whether she had said the wrong thing. I was smiling, but she didn't realize it. She went on talking and suddenly she was telling me the most amazing thing of all.

"The vultures insist on stealing Clankolite women for their wives," she said, "in order to keep their race going."

"But why must they have *Clankolite* women? Aren't there enough vulture women?"

"There are none at all," she said. "No female vultures are born. Only males. That's why there'll always be stealing—and war."

CHAPTER X

THE rain came down in torrents.

Was it only last night that Stone Jaw and I had chosen the cave for our night's lodging? Now it was Tangles.

I huddled outside the entrance where I could keep guard against any chance intruders. I had chosen a warm dry corner, and should have slept. But the excitement of my adventures weren't conducive to rest.

Before me there loomed a tremendous obstacle. It hovered over me as real as those rain clouds and far more threatening. It was sure to soak me again and again as long as I should live on this moon.

I was a vulture.

There was no escaping that fact any longer. I belonged to this race of creatures who lived in the mountains and came to the valley to steal Clankolite women.

I was not a scientist's copy of them—I was one of them.

Why I had been taken to Karloora, and why Flanger should lie to me and make me think I was a laboratory experiment might always remain a mystery to me. But I could see now, as plainly as I could see those great gashes of lightning splitting the black sky, that Flanger had known what he was talking about when he had boasted that he could get thousands more like me.

The more I thought about it the more I hoped Flanger had fallen into the teeth of a growser. Some day I would go back to that ledge where I had left the claytung wire hanging and see if I could find any clues to his strange disappearance.

Had I known what great scheme was in the minds of the passengers on the space ship that night, as they sped back to Karloora, my thoughts would have been far heavier. Perhaps I would have sped away at once, heedless of the ripping, threshing storm, to start spreading an alarm over the Blue Moon.

But I didn't know. And so the great trouble that was slowly gathering—which indeed had been gathering through all of my seventeen years—was destined soon to break upon the unsuspecting denizens of the Blue Moon.

Not knowing all this, I huddled more or less contentedly, enjoying the glory of the storm. . . . I was growing sleepy. . . . I mused over the funny things Tangles had said. . . . How relaxed she had been as I had flown with her in my arms. . . . Did she mention being thrilled over this new experience of sailing through the air, supported by my wings? . . . Or was I lapsing into dreams? . . .

Tangles awakened me with a shout.

"Fire Jump, come quick! Hurry if

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you want to see them!"

HER cry came from somewhere overhead. It was morning. I bounded up. My sore stiff talons sprung me into the air and I leaped to the brow of the rocky hillside above the cave.

"Keep down!" Tangles cried. "They have sharp eyes."

"What—where—" My mumbled questions gave way to a sharp ejaculation, *"Vultures!"*

Tangles gave me a quick curious look, her eyes tracing the tight lines of my beak. Evidently the bitterness of my tone struck her as ironical.

The vultures were flying low under the foggy morning sky. I counted twelve of them. At least half of them were carrying prisoners in their arms —Clankolite women.

Occasionally we could hear a faint cry of terror echoing across the hillsides.

In a moment the procession had sailed out of sight over the southern horizon. Tangles kept on watching in deathly silence for several minutes. When she spoke her voice was mostly a whisper.

"Think of it, Fire Jump. One of those girls might have been *me,"* she said.

I gave an uncomfortable gurgle. "One of those vultures might have been me."

Tangles' forehead knitted with troubled thoughts. "I'd better get on to one of the villages. There's been an attack—maybe a big one all along the line. Some of my friends may have been taken."

To my surprise she began to talk of Breath of Clover as one of her better friends, notwithstanding the treatment she had received from Clover's warrior sweetheart. So she started off toward the nearest village to see if Breath of Clover had been spared.

I followed after her. "I'll fly you wherever you want to go. I'd be proud—"

"I'll walk," she said shortly without looking at me. "Anything with wings had better keep a safe distance away from the Clankolites for a few days."

"My wings are at your service if you ever want them again."

"My feet are tough," said Tangles. "I'd better keep them that way."

"You're sure no vultures will drop down on you?"

"I'll keep watch. If they do I'll give them this." She tossed a stone at me. "Remember, you're the one to watch out. The Clankolites are always trying new traps, especially after an attack."

She threw another stone at me, in fun, and I hurled it back; the game kept up and I amused her with my jumping antics until at last she was out of throwing range. Her roguish laughter was her farewell as she disappeared down the trail.

That was the last I saw of her—or anyone—for many days. . . .

STORMS passed, warmer days came, lush highly colored flowers bloomed and died under the patches of golden sunlight that sifted down through the tall forests.

This was the life alone that I had dreamed, and in a way it was good. I was foolish enough to think it would last.

I spent many days observing the habits of forest animals, learning which ones I must beware of, and which I could depend upon for food. I made friends with some of the chattering forest birds, after they learned that my hooked beak never opened to take them in. I made game of certain tender rodents, which were all too plentiful in this region.

It was fascinating to discover the

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mysteries of the world about me. They were lurking everywhere. What a glorious variety of smells and sounds abounded in this upper-valley forest!

And what pictures! Often at sunrise I would skim across toward the purple mountains to catch new glimpses of the triangle of suns breaking over a jagged horizon.

And there was that weird black night when the blackness was so thick that I winged up, and up, and up, to see how near I could come to making friends with the stars. The big creamy planet-moon was not shining that night, but *something else was.*

What it was remained a mystery—one of the many mysteries of the Blue Moon that haunted me during that period of exploring.

The something I saw shining—or rather glowing—might have been a forest fire somewhere south of the range of purple mountains. Or it might have been a volcano. But it was too many miles away for me to investigate; so to me it was simply a dull red glow against the sky—a whole horizon of red—a horizon farther south than I had ever seen before.

But someday, I promised myself, I would cross those massive purple mountains, and then perhaps I should see it again.

I took pains to make my chosen cave soft and comfortable. I bedded it with the thickest leaves and wove mats of leathery bark to provide a sort of upholstery. But I cursed myself whenever my bothersome memory flashed back to Flanger.

I would miss the comfort of that soft red robe in my Karloora pen, he had taunted.

I snarled at myself for thinking back upon the bitter past. But how could I avoid it? Those past contacts were the food of my brain. Whether I liked human contacts, or whether I hated them, the obvious fact was that I *missed* them.

TALKING and squawking at myself was becoming a habit with me before I realized it. And another discovery struck me cold: I was continually thinking in terms of talking *with persons.*

Let me explain.

I spent hours cleaning the dirt out of the corners of the cave—my home. I scraped some of the walls, and began scratching simple records on the smooth surfaces. I chopped away some shrubs to facilitate speedy take-offs from the ledge in front of the cave.

With each of these acts, and thousands of others like them, I found myself mentally conversing with some visitor—someone who might be interested in what I was doing.

"Do you see these records, Bendetti? These are my own invention for calculating my miles of flight. Estimates, of course. But fairly accurate nevertheless. You see, I've counted and rechecked the number of strokes for a flight from here to that bit of glazed pink rock beyond those two tall trees—a mile, I call it. At normal flying speed I cut over that distance in fifty-five strokes. . . . Of course, the light gravitation of this moon makes it possible. . . .

"No, Tangles, we weren't doing that well when you and I sailed back together from the foothills. But I've estimated that distance. On this wall is a map—"

I was not living alone. I was living with a host of human visitors, and now and then I entertained a few vultures—especially at times when I happened to be exercising my fists, boxing the air. Needless to say, the quiet flights through the moonlight became imagi-

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Fire Jump swooped down like an avenging bolt of lightning

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nary repetitions of my rescue flight with Tangles.

"You needn't fear . . . I'm taking you back to your village . . . Stop at the brook for a drink? . . . The storm may catch us . . . But I'll stand guard outside the cave while you sleep. . . ."

And thus I fed upon the bright, exciting experiences of the past. But too swiftly they became shrivelled, unreal, worn-out. They were no longer full and bright; they were only symbols of feelings that once had been.

Stone Jaw, for example, after all the warm talk that had passed between us, had narrowed down in my mind to a question mark. Flint Fingers was only a name to be hated. Breath of Clover was a fragile trembling leaf, tossed about in violent winds. Flanger was a skelton that refused to lie down in the forest, and continued to float back and forth between his moon and Karloora. And Tangles—

Tangles was something of a puzzle.

My mental image of her was always a dirty-faced little creature who was nevertheless beautiful, a tough little animal who nevertheless needed protection and sympathy.

The more I thought about Tangles, the more I felt that gnawing hunger—that illness that only grows worse when its existence is denied—loneliness.

And that is probably the real reason that I found myself, one day, confined within the bars of a Clankolite prison.

CHAPTER XI

THE prison was too small for me. It was a single-cell structure built within the rectangle formed by four trees, and it was supposed to accommodate twelve or fifteen vultures.

I was the only occupant, and the place was small enough that I felt hampered whenever I tried any kicking or jumping exercises.

It was by no means the ideal answer to my desperate loneliness. It wasn't as attractive or comfortable as my cave in the far-off cliffs. But it had its advantages. It was not isolated.

In fact, it provided excellent visibility in all directions, including straight up, since the walls and top were formed of wooden bars. Located on a knoll above the north bank of the broad blue river, it was virtually an open air observation tower. I could see across the entire village, where there was much exciting activity.

Especially after the two Karloora space ships arrived and began unloading their cargoes of claytung. But that came later.

My only complaint regarding the view was that the southeast corner was blocked off much of the time by the presence of a huge tousle-whiskered Clankolite guard, who sat just outside my bars with his broad back turned toward me. He was so immense that the wooden bench groaned whenever he shifted his position.

The bench was his station. His function was to make the jail vulture-tight. It was a rickety old structure. Whenever I leaned against the wall some loose wooden bars were sure to clatter, causing the big fat guard to jerk his massive head around and blink his piggish eyes at me suspiciously.

After I learned to maintain silence by keeping away from the walls, he forgot about me. He too was interested in watching the goings-on in the village below us. His other interest was eating. He was always munching on a leg of barbecued meat, and his unkempt whiskers were always greasy.

The two benches inside my prison pen were built tight against the barred walls, so that it was impossible for me to sit on them because of my wings.

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But by lying on my stomach I could make a bed of them, and it was here that I was lying the evening that Stone Jaw walked past.

I leaped to the wall and poked my head through the bars.

Stone Jaw looked like a king. Many such kingly figures—perhaps they were chieftains, or simply delegates from the various villages—had been arriving all day. An important assembly was about to take place at this particular town.

LIKE the others, Stone Jaw had left his growser to graze on the upland grasses. He was striding down the village path that ran past my jail. He was clean shaven. There was a handsome determination about the deep-cut lines of his face. His iron gray hair was bunched on one side of his head, fastened there with a vulture's-claw ornament. His fur-trimmed hunting costume was clean and bright. His broad shoulders were bedecked in red —the red of an elaborately brocaded saddle blanket which he had removed from his mount and clasped around his throat.

What a different Stone Jaw from the one I had cared for. But the difference was only one of appearance. This respectability and power which he wore had been won by his lonely explorations for new hunting and grazing regions.

As he strode along the trail his glance turned toward my bars. I cleared my throat. He stared, and I thought his vigorous pace slackened.

I flipped a tiny stone at him. He hesitated, gazing at my beak. My nervous fingers stopped thumping at the bars as I waited for a sign of recognition.

But he walked on briskly, only pausing to call a passing greeting to the guard. "Only one prisoner these days?"

The guard grunted an affirmative, being too busy with his eating to say more. Stone Jaw hiked on down to lose himself among the throngs around the council fires.

Had he recognized me? How could he? In spite of how well he *knew* me, he had only *seen* me for a few brief moments, and at the time I had been perched in a tree, and his returning eyesight couldn't have been very dependable.

I paced the dirt floor of my prison in high agitation. To have seen him at close range had started my restless blood boiling.

True, this was not the first time I had seen him since our parting of a season ago. For during these recent nights I had indulged in several daring escapades over a number of Clankolite villages—escapades which had finally led to my capture. I shall speak of these again presently.

The night's council was a meeting of great importance. The destiny of a race was in the balance. Even from my distance I could tell that. The demonstrations proved it. The officials were trying a new weapon. *It was a disintegration gun.*

After the demonstration began the crowds gathered in such tight knots that I couldn't see a thing. The noisy enthusiasm mounted to a frenzy. Children chased off into the darkness and returned a few minutes later bringing their parents with them. By midnight the population of the whole village and half the countryside must have been present.

AFTER the swarming multitude was forced back into lines on either side of the clearing, I could see the high official swaggering around the fire holding the bright gun high in the air. Two minor officials came into view

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bearing a log. They laid it down on the ground and scrambled back out of the way. The high official turned the gun on it and disintegrated it.

The crowd screamed with delight. Then someone yelled, "Do it again!" Another log had to be found, and another. When logs ran short, the gun was turned on chunks of rock.

With each blaze of purple fire an object disappeared and an ugly hole in the earth marked the spot of disintegration.

The demonstrator couldn't stop. His audience wouldn't let him. Everyone clamored for more things to disintegrate. And while the boys scouted around for new material, the older heads grew silent and attentive, for the high official was making a speech.

"This disintegration gun will put an end to all vultures!" he cried, and from the roar of voices it was obvious that everyone approved. "Our friends from Karloora have promised us thousands of these guns."

"How soon?" someone shouted.

"Within a few days. You've already heard the warnings of a new vulture attack to come soon. Let it come. It will be the last. If our guns come in time, we'll pick the vultures out of the air. Whether the guns come before the attack or after, we'll ride to the purple mountains and wipe this menace out of existence."

The cheering was wonderful to hear. Then—

"How do we know the guns will kill *vultures?*" someone yelled.

The question was hooted down. After these demonstrations the power of the guns was all too obvious.

Nevertheless when the boys returned with more articles, the demonstration took on a more realistic form. They threw the objects up into the air and the demonstrator shot at them as if they were flying vultures. Sometimes he hit, sometimes he missed.

The sport was so popular that some of the crowd began casting around, wishing some real vultures would show up on the scene. Meanwhile the chief demonstrator passed the gun around among the various delegates, giving each a turn at disintegrating something.

The gun was in Stone Jaw's hands when activities were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a latecomer. The crowd turned to greet their popular warrior, Flint Fingers.

Flint Fingers, having ridden his well-trained growser right up to the council fire in order to make his entrance as conspicuous as possible, stood on the beast's shoulders for a moment while he tossed the yellow saddle blanket over his shoulders and clasped it at his throat. He was a handsome figure, and everyone's eyes were on him. He called his greeting to the head official and leaped down to the ground nimbly.

THIS gave the demonstration fresh impetus. The head official began to explain the wonders of the disint gun all over again for Flint Fingers' benefit. He pointed to the blotched ground where objects had been shot out of existence.

"You'll have a turn at trying it, Flint Fingers." The official called his announcement out loudly enough to bring the crowd to attention.

"I'll demonstrate it on a vulture," Flint Fingers said. "I hear you have one imprisoned here."

The head official drew back. "We're saving that vulture. We'll need him for our traps."

Flint Fingers turned to two subordinates and snapped an order. I couldn't be sure of his words, but I saw them turn and march up the trail toward my prison.

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A moment later they and my big guard were standing outside the prison door with chains in their hands trying to agree upon some safe plan of procedure. They were unanimous upon one proposition—they needed three more men. So one of them started back down the trail to get help. And then, down by the council fire, it happened.

As nearly as I could tell, from my vantage point, Flint Fingers called for the gun before Stone Jaw had had his turn. Stone Jaw held to it stubbornly. Flint told him to take his turn and get it over with, but Stone Jaw refused.

"Not until I know what you're going to shoot," Stone Jaw barked.

"I'm taking mine at the vulture," Flint Fingers snapped. "They've gone to get him."

"You can't have him," Stone Jaw growled stubbornly. "We need him for traps."

"Give me the gun." It was an ugly snarl, and the crowd hushed.

"You don't get the gun. Not till you promise to—"

But the impetuous young hot-head bore down on the old hunter, jerked the gun out of his hands. Then as the shiny weapon slipped into Flint Fingers' grasp it blazed a streak of purple light across the corner of the council fire.

The crowd tumbled back in terror. And Flint Fingers' big heavy-muscled growser caught the stream full across the head and shoulders. On the instant the growser was gone.

"That's your turn, Flint Fingers," the head official shouted, and the crowd roared with laughter.

After Flint had handed the gun over I noticed that he edged out of the limelight as inconspicuously as possible, and walked back to where his growser had been standing. The disintegration hadn't been complete. He bent down and picked up a few drum-shaped objects containing heavy horned toes. He didn't seem particularly pleased over his find. Those feet had brought him, but they wouldn't take him back home.

CHAPTER XII

LATE that night Stone Jaw came strolling up toward my prison. He stopped and talked with the night guard. After some friendly conversation he volunteered to stand watch long enough for the guard to go down and get in on some of the all-night council fire gossip.

The grateful guard departed and Stone Jaw turned to me.

"Is it you, Fire Jump?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"I've been keeping on the lookout for you all these days. I didn't remember your face, but tonight when you tossed that stone I felt sure it was you."

"And so you saved me from Flint Fingers," I replied. There was nothing of the old cynical squawk in my voice as I added, "Thank you."

Stone Jaw smiled. "It was the least I could do for a friend." Then he chuckled. "They're still laughing at Flint Fingers over shooting his growser. He's not used to taking defeat, even in fun. But he'll erase this night when the new war on the vultures starts. He'll kill them right and left."

"How soon will the new war begin?"

"As soon as the ships arrive with the guns. Karloora's men are back of us. They left this gun as a sample. It has been kept a secret until now, when a new attack is threatening."

"The planet of Karloora is big, Stone Jaw," I said. "There are thousands of cities and millions of men. Who are

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your backers and what will they get out of it, giving you these guns?"

"I can't answer," he said. "The arrangements were made a season ago while you and I took our long walk."

"Then it's Flanger!" I snapped. "Flanger or his men. They were here at the time. It was they who brought me."

Stone Jaw nodded. "I have heard the name of Flanger mentioned. Whoever is befriending us with the guns, there'll be trouble for the vultures."

"There'll be trouble for the Clankolites," I muttered, "before Flanger gets through."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I know him. He carries a scheme in his mind that is full of death. He dreams in terms of thousands of trained fighters that can be bought and sold. That was why he trained me. To see how well I could be disciplined—I and thousands more like me. But I disappointed him. I ran away."

"You're saying strange things, Fire Jump." Stone Jaw walked back and forth uneasily. "Why should there be thousands of trained fighters?"

"So they can be sold to men who want to conquer," I replied. "Every planet that can be reached by space ship is fair game for hungry conquerors. Even this Blue Moon."

THE skies were growing pink with dawn. Stone Jaw peered about to make sure our conversation wasn't attracting any notice. A few groups of Clankolites were still lolling around the fires, where they had feasted and gossiped all night long.

"Does anyone know who you are?" Stone Jaw asked. "Do they know you came from Karloora? Have they heard you talk?"

"I haven't spoken a word since they captured me," I said.

"How did they do it? As easily as you eluded Flint Fingers. I'm surprised."

"I grew careless. I knew I was taking a risk. But Tangles and I were having such an exciting adventure that I walked straight into a trap."

"Tangles! That little homeless girl who runs around bothering everyone? How did you happen to know her?"

I reminded him that she appeared on the scene the morning his daughter came out to the cave and found him. Then I found myself telling the whole story—the space ship chase, Tangles' narrow escape from the vulture, the moonlight flight back to the brook, the storm that kept Tangles in the cave until morning.

Then I spoke of the days of solitude, my determination to live apart from all companionship, and the unendurable loneliness that gradually took possession of me.

"For a time I interested myself by making exploratory flights—each flight in a different direction. But soon my nightly excursions tended to take a definite path—always toward the Clankolite villages. I've soared high over your fires many times during these recent nights. Sometimes I flew low enough over the meadows to scare the growsers up from their sleep. Sometimes I floated so silently over your barbecue fires that I could smell the feast. And once—"

I hesitated, but Stone Jaw's eyes betrayed an eager appreciation. Perhaps he was anticipating my story.

"Did you and Flint Fingers ever agree," I asked, "upon what became of a roast fowl that mysteriously disappeared from your fire one night?"

Stone Jaw stared at me blankly. "You—you didn't dare fly down and—"

"No," I said. "I stole it without

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flying down. You see, I've generally refrained from eating birds. Perhaps it's a sort of kinship I feel for anything with wings. But my appetite was whetted by the smell of that fowl. I hadn't killed it. To steal it could hardly be any worse offense than killing it. In fact, I was learning there was a satisfaction in stealing—even a thrill—"

I wished I hadn't said it, Stone Jaw gave me such a searching look. Stealing was a vulture characteristic, of course. But I had thought of it only as a game to relieve the pressure of my loneliness.

"You took the fowl because you wanted it," said Stone Jaw.

"I hooked it," I said. "In part, it was a game of pitting my cleverness against Flint Fingers. I was defying him, not you, Stone Jaw. For I was never sure until tonight what you felt toward me. But Flint Fingers feels murder. Nothing will ever change that."

"You hooked the fowl?"

"With a long claytung wire. Then I flew over to the brook and enjoyed a feast. Your daughter is a splendid cook, Stone Jaw."

HE was laughing. Breath of Clover would laugh too, he said, when she learned the truth. For that mysterious disappearance had been the source of bitter words between her and Flint Fingers, the hot-headed young warrior being sure she had cooked it to a cinder.

"He trusts no one, and his suspicions are growing harsher every day," Stone Jaw said. He glanced down the trail toward the big bewhiskered guard who was making his way toward us at a slow sleepy pace. "Look at that massive beast of a man. If my daughter had chosen him, she could be no more miserable than now. But she has already given Flint Fingers a third faith-gift—the yellow saddle blanket he rides upon. Now if he returns a gift they will be bound to marry."

I mused upon the implications of his talk. "Three exchanges of faith-gifts, then, are the ritual for a marriage bargain."

"Three," he repeated. My manner must have told him something I had meant to conceal, for he began to question me. Why should I be so interested in the matter of Clankolite gifts?

"Because of Tangles," I said, and reached into the pocket of my trunks. I brought forth a small disc of sun-baked clay.

Stone Jaw turned it in his fingers and studied the circular design imprinted upon it.

"It's an imprint of a Karloora coin," I said.

"Where'd you get it?"

"Tangles left it for me."

"What did she say it meant?"

"We've never spoken of it. I found it one day when I flew down to the brook where we first talked. A small pyramid of stones had been built. Under the top stone I found this clay ornament. I knew Tangles had left it. I hadn't seen her for many days, but I took this to be a message from her. So—"

"Yes?"

"I made a clay imprint of this eagle symbol I wear and left it on the pyramid. A few days later it was gone."

"How do you know it was Tangles who took it?"

"Because one day I found her there, waiting to talk with me. She was wearing the eagle disk on a string like a charm."

Stone Jaw was stupefied. "I'll keep these matters a secret. But hear my advice, Fire Jump—" He drew a deep

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breath but found no words to finish. "You must get out of here and fly to the hills before this war begins. Otherwise—"

"I'll have no dealings with thieving, killing vultures. Tell me what I can do to prove loyalty to you and your people."

Stone Jaw glanced at my eagle face. He reached out and brushed his hand over the feathers of my throat. He couldn't have said it any more plainly. The Clankolites wouldn't think of accepting loyalty from one of my build.

"But I've already tried," I said desperately. "We've been helping to spread the warning to all the villages."

"We?"

"Tangles and I. She was the first one to see the vulture scouting party. I flew with her and we trailed the scouts all the way down the river until they passed the last village and headed back toward the mountains."

"You flew *with Tangles?"*

"I carried her in my arms. She isn't heavy. And I'm much better at flying than I was at first."

"And then what?"

"THEN Tangles kept talking about how horrible it would be when the vultures came back to make their raids. So on our return we made a stop near each village, and I kept out of sight while she ran in to spread the warning. It gave me a wonderful sense of importance to be doing something for all the Clankolites. But I grew overconfident and careless about keeping hidden. While I waited outside this place a short distance down the river, I bounded over to a very conspicuous fruit tree, and a rope trap sprung—"

"Sssssh!" Stone Jaw whispered, glancing toward the trail. "No more time to talk. You should be a hero, Fire Jump. But there's more chance you'll be a corpse. Anyway, stay where you are, and I'll try to get next to one of the big officials before the trouble breaks. . . ."

I watched Stone Jaw ride away on his growser. Three hills away I could still distinguish the bright speck of red that was his brocaded saddle blanket. Then he disappeared and the brightness of the day was gone, and there was only that mountain-shaped guard sitting on the bench, smacking his lips over a grisly bone.

The following morning I awoke to strange noises.

Clang. Clang. Clankety, clankety, clang.

I rubbed my eyes and sat up. Such sounds I hadn't heard since leaving Karloora.

Bright lights to the north and west of me stabbed my eyes. I looked out upon the hulls of two space freighters, each reflecting the triangle of suns from their polished metal noses.

Other flashes of light came from the open locks where the cargo was being unloaded—long sheets of glistening claytung.

Probably no previous day in the history of the Blue Moon had ever brought so much excitement. Two shiploads of warriors' goods! The benefactors of Karloora had made their promise good. The ships had slipped in silently during the night, but watchers and officials had been quick to summon workers to the scene, and there would be no more silence until the work was done.

The trails from the village to the upland meadow, where the freighters had landed, were alive with all sorts of traffic throughout the day, and I gathered in no end of news and gossip, simply by lying under my bench and keeping my ears open.

Under the bench appealed to me as

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the most comfortable place to spend the day. The disint guns had come and many of the more important Clankolites were spending the day playing at target practice. The climate wasn't right for me to be thrusting my eagle beak out through the bars.

The sheets of claytung were for armor. Claytung armor would withstand the disint fire, and in the thick of battle it would be well to be fully protected from one's own fire. Besides, as the friendly Karloorans were said to have observed, a vulture might be clever enough to steal a disint gun and use it.

A few sample suits of claytung armor had come with the cargo, and one of them clanked along over the trails several times during the day. The wearer was usually shouting at someone with a disint gun to go ahead and shoot him, and the gunman would yell back, "I am shooting." A rowdy crowd would follow along watching the purple fire spray off the armored man's back, making funny remarks and thoroughly enjoying the show. Soon they would all be wearing claytung and carrying guns. Let the vulture hordes come.

WATCHING a child with a new toy is doubtless a good show on any planet. But watching these Clankolites with new guns and armor was in a class by itself. When the village chieftain was finally persuaded to put on his full war regalia and ride through the streets on his growser, shooting holes in the ground, the glory of the day reached its climax.

The space ships had moved on early in the morning to take cargo on to other villages. But the pandemonium of clanging metal went on all day. Stone workers were transformed into claytung-smiths as if by magic, to undertake the work of constructing great quantities of armored suits at once.

By evening the jubilations were somewhat marred by rumors of shooting accidents that had taken a tragic toll among several of the villages. This unpleasant news was hard to take. There was some talk among the officials of issuing no more guns until a system of training could be established.

But on the other hand it was argued that the big attack was imminent. The season and the weather were right for vulture trouble. Moreover, other parties of vulture scouts had been sighted recently. The need for some hasty preparation was imperative, if these new tactics were to count.

That night it came—a full force attack of vultures.

CHAPTER XIII

IT WASN'T my war. Stone Jaw had made that plain.

But I was in on it. The instant that arrows and vulture feathers began to fly I leaped into action. Well-planned, sure-fire action. I knew my immediate enemy far better than he knew me.

It was almost unfair: I could move so fast and that mammoth guard was so sluggish. He seemed scarcely aware that a general battle was on, even though the screams of women were already ringing out from the village.

I knew the very bar that would practically fall into my hands at a touch. I caught it out of the darkness on first reach. I jumped to the south wall and thrust my arm through, club and all.

The big guard, squirming on the bench disconcertedly, was a mountain of shadow against the sparks of the village campfires.

I swung the club. *Klunk.* The mountain of shadow avalanched to the ground.

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I ripped three more bars out of the wall. Then there was a fluttering from the other side and I saw a pair of eagle eyes glaring at me through the blackness.

The damning invective, "Vulture!" slid to the tip of my tongue, but luckily I swallowed it. I reached for a club. Then I discovered that the winged creature was kicking and jerking at the bars.

"Out!" the vulture croaked in a guttural tongue, "Out! . . . Out! . . . Come! . . . Fight!"

Together we snapped two more bars out. Then I leaped through without touching my wings or talons.

My winged rescuer beckoned at me. But without waiting he flew off to join the attackers elsewhere. Releasing prisoners was only so much routine with him. Our paths would never cross again.

Left to my own devices, I took to the air and skimmed high over the thin strings of disint fire. I dodged other vultures plowing through the upper blackness. Soon I was safely on my way to the west-most village to find Stone Jaw. . . .

By the time I arrived things were comparatively quiet. The attack on this settlement had come and gone an hour before. It had left devastation in its wake. These Clankolite warriors, caught in a confused state over whether to use the new fancy weapons or their old reliables, had given a poor account of themselves.

I COULD hear Flint Fingers' voice above all the others. He was trying to make up for everyone's poor fighting by his own loud shouting.

He evidently had done well enough himself, however, with a disint gun. But the villagers were not counting distintegrated vultures now. They were counting their own casualties, and especially their missing.

I saw Stone Jaw sitting a long way back from the fire, his head in his hands. I knew from his attitude that tragedy had come his way.

I overheard some Clankolite children saying that a vulture had flown down and seized Breath of Clover.

I bided my time in the darkness until it was safe to call to Stone Jaw. He was lost in his grief and didn't hear me at first. I approached him and pressed a hand against his shoulder. He looked up slowly, trying to see me in the dark.

"Fire Jump?" he asked, and his uncertain manner reminded me of the days when he had been helpless.

"You need my help, Stone Jaw."

"I—yes—" He rubbed his fingers over his forehead. Then he looked up to see some warriors crossing past a firelight. "You've no business here, Fire Jump," he whispered tensely. "They'll shoot you on sight. Take yourself away."

"I'll follow the vultures, Stone Jaw," I said. "I'll overtake them. If Breath of Clover is alive I'll recover her."

"Could you?"

Instantly I took off into the air.

For hours afterward his last two words echoed in my ears and I still saw him in my mind's eye, sitting there looking up at me like a forlorn statue.

I flew south.

By the time the eastern clouds took on the weird amber-colored flames of dawn I was nearing deep purple mountains.

Looking backward I saw a thin black horizontal line against the northern sky, and I knew that I was ahead of the returning hordes of vultures.

I dropped down into the scrubby forest land and refreshed myself with food and rest and sweet water from a lively mountain spring.

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The dark line was coming closer. Soon the swiftest of the vultures were flying over me. I lay on a grassy slope, half-hidden by the thin shrubbery; I propped my head in my hands and began to count.

"Thirty-five . . . thirty-six . . . thirty-seven. . . ." And a few minutes later: "Two thousand . . . two thousand and one . . . two, three, four—"

A VERITABLE cloud of wings filled the sky, now, and I was forced to estimate in hundreds.

Not until this first cloud had passed did I begin to see the vultures who were bearing captives. They weren't making such good speed. Also among these slower ones were vultures that had come away with minor wounds and damaged wings.

These stragglers were widely scattered. Their complete lack of formation was all to the good. My job of rising to lose myself among them was going to be easy. They would never distinguish me as any different from themselves as long as I kept moving.

At least, so I thought. And within limits my theory was correct.

Up into the air I went, to mingle with creatures of my kind. At once I went to work. Somewhere among these hosts of captive women I hoped to discover Breath of Clover. . . .

Was that girl Tangles? My heart jumped a beat.

I swerved closer to the vulture I was about to pass, and succeeded in getting a clear view of the captive girl lying limp beneath his brown wings. No, I was mistaken.

I closed my eyes and drifted along almost unconsciously to wear off the shiver of fright. That shock was repeated many times, always with a chill of terror. So many of the new faces I saw *might* have been Tangles. Or Breath of Clover.

All day long the flight continued, and with it my fruitless searching.

CHAPTER XIV

IT WAS night over the land of the vultures. The long journey had beeen completed. The exhausted travelers had gone to their separate homes. Talk had been cut short in favor of rest. Wings and heads were drooping.

I might have rested too, had I not been too entranced by the strangeness of this world. Against the deep purple sky could be seen the black forms of winged sentinels stationed on black towers of rock. Gnarled, barren trees spread their crooked black arms above the jagged horizon. The mystery of the scene was a mystery that could almost be touched lie the feel of magic velvet that melted in one's fingers.

There was an exotic smell that pervaded the thin atmosphere of these basalt mountains, a smell that was strangely familiar. The breath of nostalgia that had come to me the day I landed on this Blue Moon now returned to fill my lungs and my blood stream with something out of a long forgotten past.

Instinctively I knew that these rugged mountains, these deep blue basalt pits and jagged gray trees were *my* land. This was where I had been born—

Or at least it was where I *should* have been born.

Indescribable torments were lodging within the cells of my body. Not the physical torments of torn ligaments or burned flesh, but torments no less painful and far more confusing.

To whom did I owe my deepest loyalties?

How solidly had I allied myself with

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my Clankolite friends?

All at once these questions were burning me and I tried to answer them.

Aside from one or two Karloora friends—Magistrate Bendetti and his good wife—there were no persons in the world who meant more to me than Stone Jaw, and—for his sake—the beautiful Breath of Clover. And above all, Tangles.

There were other Clankolites, too, that I had come to have an interest in. There was the high official who had demonstrated the disintegration gun, who had supported Stone Jaw against Flint Fingers when my life had been in the balance. There were several rough-and-tumble warriors whom I had watched during their excitement over the coming war.

To have been with these people for a few days, to have watched them from the skies at night, to have stolen from them and played tricks on them and to have carried Tangles around to warn them—these experiences had bent my human sympathies.

To be sure, I even felt a grudging friendship for the big slouchy guard whom I had knocked out with a club.

THOSE were the sturdy rugged tribes who had thrived in spite of the humiliations and defeats they had suffered at the hands of the vultures. They were the people who were now rising to a common cause. With their new weapons they would make an end of the vultures. They would not stop short of complete extermination.

And here I was realizing with every breath that my deepest instincts came from here.

I moved silently past crags and towers of rock, sometimes flying, sometimes padding along on foot. These massive veins of brittle rock felt good to my talons. I floated past a huge dead tree where a lone vulture was perched, his sleeping form silhouetted against the starry sky.

That vulture might have been my brother.

The mound-shaped hut down on the flat rock was his home. It was his to guard, night or day, whenever there might be danger. Baby vultures would be born there, for within that roofed nest there must live a woman—a stolen Clankolite girl.

I flew on, trying to thrust these thoughts out of my feverish mind. But I kept recalling Tangles—her frightened look on that morning when she saw the vultures flying over with their captives.

I would go on searching for Breath of Clover. But somehow I knew that here, in this land, on this night, I had discovered something that was rightfully mine. And I would not forget it. . . .

It was many days before I left the purple mountains and flew back to the valley of the Clankolites.

The village of Stone Jaw had not been moved, and I surmised that plans had been changed after the arrival of guns and armor. The greener pastures could wait.

I approached the village with great caution. Someone was coming over the meadows on a growser. I knew from the red brocaded saddle blanket that it was Stone Jaw.

I circled him, pointing to the gold emblem I wore on my right hip to be sure he knew me. But I needn't have. He recognized me at once from the lines of my heavily muscled body, if not from my wings.

He called a greeting to me. The growser started snapping at the air, raring for a fight. So Stone Jaw climbed down and left it to graze, agreeing that I could fly him to his destination, so

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that we could talk undisturbed.

"I'm on my way to a cave—one that you remember," he said.

I PICKED him up and we winged away to the south.

"I needn't hold back the bad news," I said. "I didn't find your daughter. I searched the whole range of vulture settlements. I listened to the older Clankolite women talk about the new crop of captives. They spoke of many by name—daughters of their own neighbors. But no one spoke of seeing the daughter of Stone Jaw."

"I'm sure you made a good search," Stone Jaw said, with a touch of kindly smile at his lips.

"A thorough search would take years," I said. "It's impossible to go into each home, of course. But I will go back—"

"Before you tell me more," said Stone Jaw, "I have news for you. Some good, some bad. . . . Here is the cave."

We alighted at the entrance. Then I backed away lest my presence be unwelcome. *There stood Breath of Clover.*

"It's Fire Jump," Stone Jaw reassured her. "You won't be afraid of him this time, will you?"

"No." The girl smiled and glanced at me timidly. I thought of her as I had first seen her, bounding down from the growser in the moonlight, graceful, entrancingly beautiful. To see her standing before me now, smiling gratefully as her father praised me for my heroic efforts, brought back that earlier glow of indefinable emotions. Stone Jaw's words were sincere, and her smile was friendly. All the hurt and shock from the past was erased.

"You see, I was wrong," Stone Jaw said. "Breath of Clover wasn't carried away to the mountains. She is a better fighter than I knew. It was unfortunate that I couldn't call you back after I learned the truth."

"I learned many things by going," I said. "But you spoke of bad news. There can be no bad news for you, Stone Jaw, as long as your daughter is well—and happy."

"As for her happiness—" Stone Jaw frowned. "We will talk more of that later, Fire Jump. But now—the bad news is for you. It concerns Tangles—"

"She was taken?"

"She went of her own accord. She must have had a reason. I hate to think it was jealousy."

"Jealousy?"

"She knew that you flew away to the mountains to try to rescue me," said Breath of Clover, reddening.

"But there must have been some deeper reason for her strange actions," Stone Jaw added hastily.

I was stupefied. Their fragments of news had burst on me so swiftly that I couldn't understand it.

"Are you telling me," I asked, "that Tangles voluntarily went back to the mountains with the vultures?"

"No, no, no," Stone Jaw stammered. "She went back to Karloora with one of the space freighters . . . voluntarily."

CHAPTER XV

I RETURNED to my own cave—the mansion of loneliness in the cliffside a few miles up the valley.

My burden of despondency was never so heavy before. All the weight of the Blue Moon hung from my wings when I flew, and settled upon my back when I tried to sleep.

On days when Stone Jaw made his trips out from the village to visit his daughter I came to talk with them The

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troubles were heavy upon them, too.

Breath of Clover was hiding. On the night of the big attack she had not only freed herself from a vulture. She had freed herself from Flint Fingers—she hoped. Under the blanket of darkness she had fled, knowing the villagers would believe her kidnapped.

And so they did. They and Stone Jaw had mourned her loss. He had not learned the truth until later while on a hunting jaunt.

Now he was "hunting" almost daily, to keep watch over her.

"If Flint Fingers ever finds out, he will be angry enough to do murder," Stone Jaw told me. "And yet by the Clankolite code he may force a marriage. For their exchange of faith-gifts was completed before the attack."

Breath of Clover wept silently as her father told me these things. Flint Fingers had slapped her and struck her down during the last quarrel. Why had she ever thought she could love him?

"The truth is, he has changed for the worse since he gained fame as a vulture killer," said Stone Jaw. "And now there is a new story of his cruel intentions. It concerns you, Fire Jump."

"Me? But Flint Fingers doesn't even know me."

Breath of Clover burst out crying again. She had told Flint Fingers all about me.

"I didn't mean to," she sobbed. "But after I made the first slip he threatened me until he got the whole story—even about you and Tangles. You see, Tangles thought you were so grand, trying to warn all the villages—and I tried to make Flint understand."

And so I learned that my secret was out. Rumors about me were running riot through the villages. Fire Jump, the vulture who had been in prison during the gun demonstration, was a very special vulture who had visited the planet of Karloora, and who had tried to wedge himself into the social life of the Clankolites.

How?

By the most despicable of tricks. By taking advantage of a hunter who was temporarily blind. And by playing on the sympathies of a ragged little orphan girl.

CHILLS played through my wings as I heard these rumors. I turned to search Stone Jaw's deep-lined face.

"What does this talk do for you?"

"Flint Fingers charges that I am a traitor," Stone Jaw said dispassionately. "He says he is going to put me to the test."

"How?"

"By forcing me to kill you." Stone Jaw managed to smile as he said it.

"Do you carry a disint gun?" I asked.

"We'll all carry them when we make our attacks on the mountains. At that time, if not sooner, it will be my special task to search you out and put an end to you. If I fail, Flint Fingers will have the satisfaction of branding me a traitor."

"It sounds simple," I said, drawing the corners of my beak in a smile. "But there's a catch in it. Disint guns don't leave any dead bodies to prove your valor."

"Sometimes the wings are left. Or maybe a foot."

"But that's a matter of chance. If I'm in danger of being disintegrated I won't be standing still. You'll be lucky if I leave you a single feather to prove your deed."

Stone Jaw studied me with amusement.

It was all right for me to joke, but that problem had caused some real worry for Flint Fingers. However, the young warrior was prepared to go to some trouble to win his point. Let

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me be captured first, he had advised. Then Stone Jaw could be forced to perform his act of allegiance in public.

"It still sounds quite complicated," I said. "There are thousands of us vultures, and we all look pretty much alike. How can anyone hope to capture me?"

"I put the same question to Flint Fingers," Stone Jaw replied. "His answer was that there was at least one person besides myself who could identify you: the big jail guard. Then he gave another clue. You would be found near Breath of Clover."

"I don't understand."

"I hate to say this," said Stone Jaw. "But the rumors have taken a very vicious turn. Everyone believes it was you who flew away with my daughter."

There was a tense silence. My facetious mood vanished and the heat of anger filled me. Was my every effort to help doomed to explode in my face?

"I tried to tell them," Stone Jaw said, "that you had gone to rescue her, as a favor to me. But Flint Fingers wouldn't believe me. He damned me for a traitor and you for a thieving vulture."

"Did Tangles hear this story?" I gasped.

"She must have heard."

"And believed it?"

"Who knows?"

A FEW days later we talked again, and I found that Breath of Clover had fought it out with herself. She had decided to go back and face Flint Fingers. Only by doing so could she prove to the Clankolites that I was innocent.

It was a noble decision. This timorous, troubled girl possessed more than physical beauty. Her real strength of character was something to excite high admiration.

But I wouldn't think of letting her go through with her rash plan.

"Go back and marry a man you hate?" I squawked. "Not while your father and I live to prevent it. Let Flint Fingers and the other rumor mongers do their worst against me. I'll take care of myself."

My words brought a kindly smile to Stone Jaw's face. His hand clutched that of Breath of Clover. He wouldn't have let her go through with it, I am sure; but he had been pleased that she had risen to such a decision—and confident that I would set it aside.

I took Breath of Clover and her father to my own cave. It was high time to take all precautions for their safety. Two more space freighters had arrived with materials for Clankolite warriors. Their raids would soon begin.

"This cave will be our refuge," said Stone Jaw. "I'll confer with hunters —those I can trust—and keep in touch with what happens. But the more I keep out of public affairs the better—until Flint Fingers loses some of his power."

Breath of Clover was through with tears, now that she felt that her bond with Flint Fingers was completely broken. But I couldn't help wondering how long she would be able to endure this exile. I recalled the maddening loneliness I had suffered.

The raids began the next day . . . War! It had come with new terrors. Foolishly I thought I could avoid it.

Through the cool season that followed I did a great deal of roving, from the valley haunts of Stone Jaw to the purple mountains of the vultures—and even beyond. Whenever I returned to the cave Stone Jaw and I exchanged news and gossip from our respective worlds. The war. The thousands of dead vultures. The frightened stampedes of growsers. Flint Fingers' rise to power. Latest kidnappings of Clan-

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kolite women.

Whether Breath of Clover knew it or not, the loneliness was coming over her. Her eyes were wistful as I told her of the life of the captive women in the land of the vultures. Her father frowned as he noted her eagerness to hear more.

"How do they live?" she asked. "Are they terribly unhappy?"

"Not as you'd think," I said. "You should have been there to see how the new captives were greeted by the older women. You can scarcely imagine a warmer reunion."

"Any marriage ceremony?"

"Of a sort—extremely simple. The vultures don't go in for ritual. But there were no immediate marriages. You see, the vulture who captures a girl doesn't necessarily get her. At least, not at once. She's protected in the home of some older woman until she's gotten used to the vulture's ways. In the meantime the vulture tries to make a favorable impression in order to win her."

"How?"

"By bringing her food. By standing guard. By appearing to be strong and brave. Even by defending themselves against Clankolite guns.

"Of course, the women never get over their terror from being captured—or do they?" Breath of Clover's eyes flicked up at me searchingly.

"Their spirits vary. I can't see many signs of terror among those who have been there a few years. Sadness—yes. They talk of the old Clankolite days. They sing old Clankolite songs together. And when new captives come with fresh news from the valley, there is weeping and homesickness. But there is also laughter. And talk—talk."

THE girl's eyes glistened. "Maybe they're not so unhappy."

Poor thing. It was so obvious that her eager interest was a rebound from her dread of Flint Fingers.

"At least it's a remarkable fact," I observed, "that the captured women don't return. They accept their lot. Most of them appear to be content."

"Do you think—" Breath of Clover looked off into the distance dreamily. "Do they grow to love—I mean—"

Stone Jaw interrupted with an irritated cough. His daughter's curiosity was more than he could stand. He moved restlessly to the ledge in front of the cave and tried not to listen.

"There's not much social communion between the vultures and the women," I said. "I've never heard them laugh together—or quarrel. The vultures aren't very communicative. They're as crude in their speech as they are in their eating habits or their fighting."

Breath of Clover had heard them talk, she said. She had listened to vulture prisoners. "They give sharp caws, like birds. They'll say, 'Come! . . . Go! . . . Eat !. . . Bring!' "

Stone Jaw turned to get back in the conversation, driven by a curiosity of his own.

"Is it true, Fire Jump, that there are no women vultures?"

"That's the strange fact. No female babies are born. Only males. That's why this thievery and war will keep right on forever between you and—and us."

My last word made Stone Jaw catch his breath. He gave me a look as if to say, "No more of this talk. It's working on my daughter's imagination."

Breath of Clover slipped past us and swung down the path, her hair tossing in the wind. Her father called to her, but she was in a pensive mood and didn't bother to answer.

"There, see what you've done," Stone Jaw muttered to me. "She's gone

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off to have some more fool daydreams about happiness." Then observing my thoughtful silence, he asked, "What are you thinking, Fire Jump?"

"About the Clankolite raids," I said, "and about my part in this war. I may not see you again, Stone Jaw, for many days."

"I thought you meant to avoid the war. . . . But I understand. Neither of us can do that, Fire Jump. If you take up arms against the Clankolites, I can't blame you. I know how you must feel."

"Life in the purple mountains has a fascination for me, Stone Jaw," I confessed. "As things are going now it may all be swept away. But I've been thinking. . . . Do you know anything of the great lake of fire beyond the mountain—deep within a pit?"

"No Clankolite ever goes to it, because of the vultures. I've heard that some explorers have seen its glow from mountain tops. Why?"

"I've flown above it," I said. "From my first glimpse I determined to look down into it. It's like a deep ocean of fire within walls that drop straight down for miles before they're lost in red flames."

STONE JAW studied me, wondering why I should be interested.

"It's a strange thing," I continued. "The vultures never fly over it. That seems to be their one taboo. But I flew out over it and returned unharmed."

"Did the vultures threaten you for violating a taboo?"

"On the contrary, my boldness, together with my flying ability, seemed to meet with their favor. I can outfly any of them. You see, I fought against the heavy gravity of Karloora when I was young, and consequently developed superior muscles."

"You stand a good chance to be a leader," said Stone Jaw.

Breath of Clover, who had sauntered back to us, still in a reverie, observed dreamily, "Fire Jump, you should lead the vultures and father should lead the Clankolites. Then all our wars would be ended."

Stone Jaw and I exchanged smiles. We both knew that this conflict sprang from a caprice of nature which no leader could change. The vultures must have mothers for their children—or they must die.

CHAPTER XVI

ABOVE the river trail wings were being blown along like huge dead leaves. Vulture wings—but no vultures.

Those disint guns were horrible things. The first four great battles had taken place along this trail, and they had been disasters for my side.

Rarely would the disint fire fail to kill. And yet there were a few freak shots that took the body and left the wings. Other chance shots melted a single wing—or both wings—off a vulture's back, but let him live. And so, in the wake of the beaten vultures, retreating on wing, there followed a few mutilated creatures who hiked homeward on their talons.

On my flights back into the purple mountains I frequently picked up a wingless straggler and carried him back.

On such occasions I was careful to talk only in the same blunt terse squawks that all vultures used. But my efforts to mingle anonymously were not successful. My flying was too good. My curiosity about all vulture matters was too evident.

This undue attention from the piercing eyes of my fellows—not to mention that of their captive females—became

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disturbing. The prediction that Breath of Clover had made was not entirely absurd. I was already being singled out as a sort of leader. My hints and suggestions carried weight.

The name Fire Jump fascinated the vultures. Along one particular stretch of mountainside that I frequented, they would squawk my name from their perches whenever I passed. Their own names conformed to a monotonous pattern; Kup, Kut, or Kaut, or something similar. Kawk was a favorite. From White Tooth Point, where I had built a shelter and adopted a lofty observation post, I could fly past the perches of a score of vultures in as many strokes. Three-fourths of them were called Kawk.

Some of these Kawks and Kuts and Karks wanted to follow me when I made my second trip out over the Lake of Fire. But they grew faint-hearted and turned back, so I flew alone.

This time I made it all the way across. For a reason. I was exploring for a vulture refuge.

What I found was a blue crater region—an eagle man's paradise—*uninhabited.*

The thrill of my first breathtaking glimpse of this Blue Moon came back to me in full force. Here were higher mountains and more rugged forests than any I had seen before. The land abounded with game. It was ideally protected from any invasion of wingless men. The vast blue basalt ridges and precipices, the deep pits and craters, were an invitation to eagle men. But not to men. Travel would be too difficult.

It seemed incredible that the vultures hadn't claimed this land before.

Or had they?

HERE and there were signs of old sunken vulture houses. I followed around the rim of the lake of fire for several miles, and the signs of earlier vulture settlements were still to be seen. As I flew through a long arc in a northwesterly direction I was convinced that those evidences looked less ancient. This part of the land had been inhabited a little more recently. Still, it must have been deserted many generations ago.

Why?

As I flew back across the Lake of Fire my ponderings brought an answer. It was simply a case of gradual migration. Game may have been found slightly more plentiful in the region just ahead. And so, during successive generations, the whole vulture population had continued its circling movement. To the west. To the north. On around. Ever to the right. So that now the entire settlement lay in the purple mountains north of the Lake of Fire.

The vultures may have been unconscious of the fact that they were slowly migrating.

If this were true, what of the taboo against crossing the Lake of Fire?

Had it been in existence long ago when the vultures lived on the *opposite* side of the lake? Perhaps that would never be known. The vultures had no memories for sagas of the past.

Of one thing I was certain. I had discovered the ideal refuge for those vultures who would dare to make the crossing. . . .

I succeeded in getting forty families to move. I flew across with them. Each vulture made two or three flights to bring his mate, his offspring, and a few possessions.

Thus the beginning of a refuge colony was established in the Blue Crater Region. Forty families were safe from the deadly disint guns. I reminded them of this, before I left them, and it was good to see those young Clankolite

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mothers cooing to little winged fellows in their arms. Here was safety and security. They were happy.

Five minutes later, as I winged off toward the rim of the Lake of Fire I saw the white space ship.

It lay three or four miles to the west, bright against the blue mountains.

It was a small ship, resting on a narrow stretch of level rock. I winged toward it at full speed—in time to see its four passengers get aboard.

There were two men, two women. All were Karloorans, dressed for mountain climbing. But from my distance I had been unable to form any other impressions. I watched the ship take off and float away, high above the Lake of Fire.

WHEN I reached the spot where the ship had rested I searched for clues as to the motive of their visit. Was this a scouting party for a coming attack? Could Karloora be so interested in seeing the Clankolites defeat us that they would lend space ships?

I found nothing to prove or disprove this theory. The one discovery I made only lent mystery to the situation. Some of the ancient vulture huts had been broken into. Here and there some excavating had been done.

Before I crossed that lake I swept back to the new colony to make sure the settlers weren't in a panic over approaching danger. But they hadn't seen the ship. They were all at work building new houses, and the women were singing high-spirited Clankolite songs.

The panic was across on the other side.

The moment I reached White Tooth Point I found my vulture neighbors and their wives in an uproar. The white ship had come and gone. It had stayed only long enough for its four passengers to get out and look around and ask a few questions. Then they had boarded and sailed away.

"Which way?"

"Into the sky—toward Karloora."

"What information did they ask?"

"About you. Where you lived. Where you had gone. When you would be back. But we couldn't say how soon because no one knows where you go or how fast you fly."

"They were trying to trap me," I said. "What else did they say?"

"The white-haired man asked if there were ever any girl vultures."

"Yes. Go on."

"The girl asked whether you had captured and married a Clankolite."

"A girl asked?"

"We told her you hadn't. Then she left something at your nest."

I took three swift leaps to land at the foot of the big white tower of rock. On the shelf of stone where I kept a few possessions was a slab of clay. It was round like a cookie, a trifle wider than the palm of my hand.

There was an imprint on it. It was the symbol of an eagle—my eagle.

To make sure, I removed the adornment from my hip and fitted it into the clay. The fit was perfect.

The other item was a cardboard box containing an exceedingly old skeleton —the skeleton of a vulture.

ONE wing of the skeleton, cupped conspicuously within the box, contained another slab of clay. A crude picture had been sketched on it with a stylus. The picture was a female figure—with wings.

I looked from the clay picture to the pile of bones. Suddenly I realized that this was a skeleton of an eagle *woman.*

For hours I flew around aimlessly, muttering all the oaths I knew.

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That skeleton was an impossibility. It couldn't be. And yet there it was.

Since I couldn't deny it, all I could do was try to ignore it. Ignore it until some explanation came. In my feverish confusion the word "freak" kept pounding through my head.

Once I had thought *I* was an impossibility—and that word "freak" had been my only answer. Then the curtains had lifted and I had seen that the mischief of Nature somehow accounted for me and thousands more like me. But a female vulture—

I fled from these baffled ponderings and turned my attention to the mystery which seemed more nearly within reach—the clay imprint of my eagle symbol.

The symbol I carried was one of two identical souvenirs purchased by Bendetti while traveling in some far-off planet. That anyone else in this corner of the universe should have a duplicate for those twin emblems was too unlikely.

That anyone had snatched mine from me while I slept and made an imprint of it was incredible. I never slept that soundly. Besides there would be no reason—

No, it was impossible. It didn't make sense. Leaving a clay disc was the sort of stunt that Tangles would—Tangles! Tangles! Could it be—

Hadn't I once talked to her about a great man named Bendetti? Was it possible that she had gone to him when she arrived at Karloora—and that she now possessed the other souvenir?

It was, of course. She had come back—in that ship. That had been she, dressed in her Karloora garments. She was one of them, now.

Why had she returned?

How could I know? I never even knew why she went. But one thing was plain. She hadn't brushed this Blue Moon out of her mind. It still had a hold on her. Either she had come back to act as a guide for that party of archeologists—if such they were—or she had persuaded them to bring her—for some game of her own.

FOR many days and nights that followed I almost forsook sleeping in favor of keeping watch, hoping the ship would return.

But it had gone back to Karloora. There was no use watching for it.

Meanwhile the war went on.

I continued with the job of urging vulture families to fly to safety.

The camp of Clankolite warriors was moving closer to the purple mountains. The disastrous battles were only a foretaste of the complete annihilation that seemed to be in store.

For more than a year the stubborn vultures kept on, all the while fighting losing battles.

I was with them in these struggles. I joined in the pitch-dark expeditions that made a few successful raids on the Clankolite store of guns. Whenever we could add disint guns to our advantage of wings, we could stage desperate counter attacks.

But the guns were never as effective for us as for our enemy, owing to their claytung armor. They were protected. We weren't. True, we might have stolen part of their armor, but we would have had to re-make it, to accommodate our wings. And then our flying speed would have been reduced.

Our strongest defenses were discovered to be the lightning attacks that we could make on sleeping warriors. The few vultures with distint guns would shower fire on the obstreperous growsers. Others of us would drop a hailstorm of stones on the sleeping camp from as low a distance as we dared swoop. Whenever we heard a loud clank of metal we knew we had scored.

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But the disint guns had gained in range in recent seasons. After every new shipment from Karloora we were caught by fire that sprayed up through our levels of safety.

For more than a year I found no time to go back across the Lake of Fire. The Blue Crater colony was almost forgotten. Although several more families had gone to join the colony, there was no communication back and forth between the old world and the new.

I was still convinced, however, that the Blue Crater Region would be our salvation. My voice worked overtime.

I had ceased to talk in the simple one-word squawks of my fellow-vultures. I opened up with ideas that could be expressed only in chains of words.

My early admonitions were, "Fly over fire!"

Now I cried, to the amazement of my listeners: "Our war will devour us. It is because we steal women. The men will kill us all."

SUCH words, hurled from my perch on White Tooth Point would cause a restless shiver of wings among thousands of stout-hearted vultures gathered around me.

"See how fast they kill. Many of us go to each fight. Few of us come back. The ravines are drifted full with wings of our dead. What can we do?"

Low mutterings would spread over the winged multitude.

"What—do?" they would echo.

"There is one answer," I would cry. "Cross the Lake of Fire. Live there. *Never steal more Clankolite women.*"

The low mutterings would become a sullen roar of protest.

After each disastrous loss those rumblings of objections came back at me stronger, not weaker.

"Not steal?" they would snarl at me. "No babies . . . We die."

"Cross the lake. Live your lives to the end," I would thunder back at them. "If you don't, the guns will kill you."

In their crude halting words they shot arguments back at me. The Clankolites might pursue anyway. They might find their way around the Lake of Fire and continue to slaughter to the last vulture.

"If you will cross," I challenged, taking a long shot in the dark. "If you will steal no more, I will make the guns quit shooting."

"Do!" they squawked. "Do! Do!"

It was gruesome, watching them as they seized upon my suggestion. Several thousands of beaks snapped the single word at me over and over. It was like seeing hungry birds crying for food.

"Do—Do—Do!" I sensed a wave of mob violence in their battle cry. I had made my boast. They wanted to see me fulfill it.

In a fever of perspiration I flew up and down the rock-veined mountainside appealing to the captive women as I had appealed to the vultures. But it was futile to hope I could make the bulk of the population move *before* I put an end to the shooting. The ubiquitous slogan of "Do!" was an unmistakable warning. I must make the guns quit shooting.

I flew north to find Stone Jaw, in hope that by some miracle I might *do!*

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS almost dawn—a dawn synonymous with death.

I trudged the ridge silently, stealthily, hugging the shadows.

Many day had passed since I went forth to *do*—but this day might be the last. I was about to meet Flint Fingers.

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According to our arrangement, Flint Fingers would come here for a decisive "conference" this morning. Our meeting was timed to the first ray of morning light when the first of the three suns poped into sight on the mountain horizon.

I clutched a disint gun—a new one—a *gift*.

The gray grew lighter. My eagle eyes watched everywhere.

Here was the highest crest of the ridge, the appointed place. It was only twenty yards above these shadows where I lurked. My tense muscles urged me to climb those remaining yards, my eyes craved a glimpse of the enemy I knew was waiting just beyond that crest.

Sounds reached me from the other side.

'Haaaaaah!"

I knew that coarse breathy noise. It was the yawn of a growser. The dumb beast could yawn at a time like this! But wait until it caught sight of my wings.

Flint Fingers might have brought a herd of growsers, for all I knew. I wasn't expecting a fair fight. I had come to know him too well. He would be there, but he would have protection, I was sure.

"Haaaaaaah!" The growser was some distance back of me, now. I could barely hear it, tramping over the rocks. Whoever they were that made up Flint Fingers' party, I knew they had explored both sides of this ridge to get the lay of the land. I could smell the sickeningly sweet odor of growser saliva in the motionless air that clung to these rocks.

Sunrise was only seconds away. At last the plan I had hurled at the vultures as a substitute for slaughter was due to win or lose. It bid fair to lose.

In recent days I had got my message through to the Clankolites, directing my appeal to Stone Jaw himelf. He had done everything in his power to bring about an agreement. But once more he had been branded a traitor by Flint, because of his dealings with me.

My proposition was simple. We vultures wanted to strike a bargain. Not because we were defeated. Rather because we had the principle to face the fact—that our stealing wasn't justifiable.

We would quit. We would go across the Lake of Fire. But you, the Clankolites, must also quit. Then the war would be ended. And finally both sides must agree that we would never have any further traffic with Karloora arms.

That was it. And after a heartbreaking effort I had succeeded in winning the support of several vulture leaders. And therein came the tragedy. Seven out of ten of them gave their lives for it.

Those ten leaders had agreed to fly to a given place of meeting. Flint Fingers had insisted that a representative body of leaders from each side should be there. In good faith the vultures went.

THEN the Clankolites played their merciless advantage. In cold blood they shot all but three of the ten vultures.

Such treachery would never have been approved by the bulk of the Clankolites; but Flint Fingers managed to cover it. Then, with a stroke of diplomacy as smooth as jagged lightning —and as gentle—he decided to repeat his treachery. This time he meant to catch me alone.

At least that was my interpretation, when the news filtered through to me that he was ready to meet me in a private conference.

Now it was dawn.

Again I could hear a growser just

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over the ridge. Not a sleepy one this time, but a restless one, pawing the earth.

Then I saw the figure of a huge man moving past a streak of light between two rocks. He crept past slowly. A moment later his head showed as he peaked over the crest. I waited for a gun to appear.

But the bulky head drew back out of sight and didn't reappear. What was the meaning—

I knew that face. That was the jailer who had watched over me—the one man who could identify me. So Flint Fingers was taking the trouble to make sure I hadn't sent a substitute to do my "conferring" for me.

The first ray of light shot across the crest from the first rising sun. I marched forward, gun ready. My eyes and ears were on the alert. But no attacks were moving on me from the rear. The scene of action was straight ahead.

Thump-thump-thump-thump—

Over the crest the big growser came bounding pell-mell. The figure astride it was a veteran rider—and shooter. He paved the way for his rush with a line of purple fire. Straight as a taut string the deadly disintegration rays came at me.

I leaped to the left and plunged forward. For three swift jumps my nimble feet outguessed the Clankolite's shots. By that time my own gun had thrown one fatal bar of fire straight through the growser's head.

The big ugly head broke into blue flakes and melted away. The big decapitated mass of growser-flesh went crashing down over the stones.

The rider leaped off, barely catching himself on his feet. His claytung armor clanked as he jerked up straight and swung his gun around for action.

Then he stopped. His action froze so suddenly that I wondered if my disint fire had penetrated his deathproof armor. He was staring at me. In particular, he was eyeing the symbol of the eagle that I wore on my hip. Instinctively I knew it.

I cut off my gunfire on the instant. At his feet lay a red brocaded saddle blanket that had flown off the growser with him. *A red brocaded blanket!* Flint Fingers was less clever than I thought.

IT WAS a strange way for a duel to end. The armored man slowly and deliberately flung his gun off to one side and marched down toward me with his armored hands extended.

That stride of his proved what the blanket had not. It was Stone Jaw. He was refusing to kill me. He would take his chances on my killing him.

"Fire Jump!" he cried, his words resounding through his metal helmet. "You've earned the name. Am I safe—"

"Where's the jailer?" I croaked back at him.

"Who?" Stone Jaw whirled, suddenly aware that the trouble was not over. It had just begun. It was plain that he had been hoaxed into this fight without knowing any of the circumstances.

Then it came—three sprays of disint fire from a hideout on the Clankolite side of the ridge. The fire was aimed not at me but at Stone Jaw. He had just started to remove his helmet when the lines of purple darted toward him. I spanked the headpiece down over the back of his neck as I jumped past him.

"Run south!" I cried.

Stone Jaw ran south, and from then on it was up to me. But I had wings and I knew when to use them. And at the moment it was apparent this frame-up was aimed primarily at Stone Jaw.

Not because he was a traitor. He

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wasn't, and three-fourths of the Clankolites knew it. In recent days these rumblings of revolutions had been heard all the way to the tops of the purple mountains.

No, they were pouring their deadly efforts upon Stone Jaw because he was a threat to Flint Fingers' leadership. The young warrior had overplayed his hand, inviting the Karloorans to bring on their war weapons. Stone Jaw's moderation—his willingness to listen to a fair plan from the vultures—had gained support like a wave of wildfire in a high wind.

And so at this moment, as Stone Jaw hurled his gun aside upon discovering he had been framed to murder me, three hidden warriors, not including the sluggish jailer, started after him to make an end of him.

My disint fire was worse than useless. Those three men were as completely armored as Stone Jaw. Yes, better. The fact that they tried to catch him with gunfire was proof enough that they had given him defective armor.

I threw my gun. I threw stones. Every object that my hands touched went whizzing through the air toward the three armored Clankolites. The jailer was out of range, jogging down the mountainsides screaming for the growsers that must have been hidden farther on. But my barrage of stones succeeded in smashing the gun out of the hands of one of the three.

He leaped after it, which was exactly what I wanted him to do. It gave me my chance to leap after him.

A DEADLY chance it was, for one spray of the disint fire shifted in my direction would have been the end of me. Such a spray didn't come—not until I had seized the tall warrior, scrambling for his gun.

I lifted him bodily, barely in time to catch a blast of purple fire against the back of his armor. My hands froze on his armored ankles and I swung him like a club.

He was Flint Fingers. I knew by the voice. He shrieked just before he struck his fellow Clankolite. He was my club, and my muscles wielded him as if he had been a dead tree limb.

Clang. Clang. Clang.

The crunch of claytung against claytung rang out. Down the mountainside the terrorized shouts of the retreating jailer stopped cold as he turned to see what was happening to his three compatriots. They were being beaten to pulp within their claytung armor.

The two stunned gunmen sank lower and lower as I alternated my blows upon them, swinging the battered bloody frame of what had once been Flint Fingers as a metal-covered club.

From a safe distance Stone Jaw stood gazing fixedly. Slowly he removed his head covering and trudged back to meet me.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE jailer sat on a flat stone above the patch of grass where the growsers grazed. He was far enough away to be out of hearing if we talked low; close enough to shudder like a loose boulder whenever Stone Jaw barked at him. He was tractable enough, and it was fortunate that he had run out of range when my rage against Flint Fingers broke loose in a fury of killing.

For the jailer would be useful to Stone Jaw. He could be made to report the truth of what he had witnessed when they got back.

Meanwhile Stone Jaw and I had the brief visit that would spell destiny for his race and mine.

"Had you, too, forgot Flint Fingers'

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threat to pit us against each other?" Stone Jaw asked, after explaining the sly deceptions which had led him to come storming over the crest at an unknown enemy.

"I expected it to be Flint Fingers, bent on killing me," I said. "But I had overestimated myself as a thorn in his flesh. And I had underestimated his cleverness at concealing your identity. I supposed he would have exchanged saddle blankets with you."

"You mean—"

"To trick me into killing you by having you ride the yellow blanket—his. When I saw the red I thought, 'Stone Jaw? Surely not. This is Flint Fingers, bent on killing me, wearing the red brocaded blanket thinking to save himself,' for I wouldn't shoot at you, willfully. But the red matched your stride—"

"Stop talking in colors," said Stone Jaw, "before you bring back my blindness . . . . Tell me, how is Breath of Clover?"

"Breath of Clover? I haven't seen her."

"She meant to come to you."

"To me? How—"

"I mean to your land. That is—" Stone Jaw reddened in confusion. "I supposed you had seen her. She's all right, of course. Probably married to one of your braves by this time."

He tried to change the subject, but I prodded him until I learned what had happened. Breath of Clover had kept in mind the things I had told her about the life of the captured women. She had held to it as an escape from the reality that had become unbearable—her promises to Flint Fingers.

THEN came the fatal day that a band of Clankolites rode toward her hiding place. She and Stone Jaw fled. One narrow escape followed another. But Flint Fingers knew, by that time, that she had not been captured. She was simply running away from him.

The story spread and did much to hurt his prestige as a leader. Nothing could have happened to throw his brutal character into sharper focus. But he was determined to win, and at length the chase ended in the foothills where the vultures and Clankolites were warring.

But Flint Fingers didn't win. In a last crucial moment, when the force of Stone Jaw's protection had been broken, Breath of Clover threw herself upon the mercy of a vulture, who snatched her up and flew off with her.

I scarcely breathed as I listened to Stone Jaw's story. Finally I broke the spell of silence that followed the telling.

"Why did you say she meant to come to me?" I asked.

"I had no right to say that," said Stone Jaw. Then, "Do you recall those times she questioned you? Didn't those questions mean anything? Or did you think she was interested only in escaping Flint Fingers?"

"I can't believe she ever thought of me."

"Why not?"

"Because she—she's so timid and fragile and beautiful. And too lovely. Deep in her heart she still has a terror of vultures. Am I right, Stone Jaw?"

The old hunter shook his head. "I don't know, Fire Jump. She's a woman, and women are always mysteries to me. I'm never sure I understand her."

"It all seems impossible, like being struck by lightning and—and liking it. I'd never felt as if I dared look at her. If she had given me a faith-gift, or some sign that she—"

"She used to leave faith-gifts in the cave for you, Fire Jump," said Stone Jaw with a twinkle in his eyes. "But

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you never saw them. The truth was, you were still thinking of Tangles. And Breath of Clover knew it. So she didn't press her gifts upon you."

"I didn't realize—"

"But now Tangles has been gone for many seasons, and Breath of Clover hasn't heard a word of her. She may never come back—"

"She has come back, Stone Jaw."

"What! When—"

"I'VE never seen her—except once from a distance—but I know she's been here. She came on a Karloora ship, with a party of scientists who dig into the relics of the past. Each time the party comes they gather a few sticks and stones and bones. Once I saw traces of their work in an old ruined vulture settlement. They had removed an entire hut, from its mud-dabbed roof to the stones beneath it."

"Where does this ship stay?"

"It doesn't stay anywhere for long. It rushes back to Karloora. That's why I've never got to talk with Tangles."

"How can you be sure it is Tangles, if you've only seen her from a distance?"

"Because she has left gifts at my lair."

"Faith-gifts?"

Stone Jaw had caught me with that question once before, long ago. Again I couldn't answer. Maybe the gifts were meant for ritual; maybe they were only messages. Stone Jaw nodded thoughtfully. If it was Tangles, he mused, she would probably leave some reminder of her visit.

But if I had not seen her, he suggested, it was possible that it was her fault. Perhaps she hadn't intended that I see her.

"Living on Karloora will have changed her, you know," said Stone Jaw. "What were her gifts?"

"The latest one—the *third*—was this disint gun—the weapon I managed to miss you with a few minutes ago. The gift of an earlier visit was a skeleton."

Stone Jaw's eyes searched me. He must have thought I had been dreaming these things. "What sort of skeleton?"

"The skeleton of a female vulture."

"There are no female vultures."

"These bones bear the characteristics of a woman. I have studied pictures in books. Bendetti the magistrate used to teach me from the school books of his son. This skeleton is a female—a winged female. It is a proof that there have been female vultures."

Stone Jaw began muttering, swinging his armored hand back and forth against the rock. Every time the claytung armor clanked, the big jailer, stationed a little distance away, gave a shudder that caused him to oscillate from his whiskers to his toes.

FINALLY Stone Jaw's hand slammed down with a bang, and the jailer jumped off his seat and landed in a pile of loose stones, causing a minor landslide.

"Fire Jump, you're the most confusing creature I ever bumped into," Stone Jaw blurted. "You upset everything."

"How?"

"Look what you've done to me in the past. First I think you're a man. Then you turn out to be a vulture. Next I plan to return your favors by getting you out of prison. Instead, you break out and start doing favors for me—"

"You're the confusing one," I broke in. "I fly off to rescue your daughter, and I return to find her safe with you. Then what does she do but go to the vultures—"

"And just when I stop worrying over her, thinking she's safe with you,"

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Stone Jaw continued, "I find you haven't even seen her. Just when I think Tangles is gone for good, you tell me Tangles has come back."

"She has *been* back," I corrected. "By now she may be gone for good."

"There you are upsetting me again," Stone Jaw put on a show of terrific exasperation, almost clowning; though under it all he was much disturbed. "But now you've gone the limit. All my life I've known that there are no female vultures. They just aren't born. But now you try to tell me—"

The thumping of growser hoofs thundered through the morning stillness. We turned to see the party of Clankolite warriors approaching. Stone Jaw knew them at sight. He glanced toward the crushed bodies of Flint Fingers and the two gunmen. He took a deep breath of satisfaction.

"At last," he said, "I'll have a chance to proclam you a hero before Clankolites who will give you fair credit. Those are my friends, Fire Jump. They're coming to find me. They'll take me back to make me the Clankolite leader—"

"I won't wait," I said, spreading my wings. "You and I have agreed on the peace—"

"It's incredible that you can persuade the vultures to live beyond the Lake of Fire, agreeing to steal no more wives. It's a voluntary suicide for your whole race—"

"We'll keep our promise, Stone Jaw," I pledged. "As long as I live, we'll never violate it."

"Then I can promise, in turn, that we Clankolites will cease to accept weapons from the men of Karloora."

"Is our business complete?" I asked.

Stone Jaw nodded. He waved to the approaching band of Clankolites and they returned his signal of friendship. Once more he returned to me with questioning in his deep-cut face.

"Breath of Clover?"

"Our agreement is to return none of the women we have already captured," I replied. "But I will search out Breath of Clover to make sure she is not unhappy."

CHAPTER XIX

I RETURNED to vulture land to search for Breath of Clover.

I learned from the old women still living near White Tooth Point that she had not yet been won by any vulture. She had moved from one home to another, part of the reason being that many families were moving across the Lake of Fire. It was a difficult time to expect any newcomer to make an adjustment.

The exodus across the lake would be completed in a few more days, now that the peace agreement had become a reality.

But the old women with whom I talked did not know whether Breath of Clover had made up her mind to crossing the lake. They had not seen her. The ubiquitous gossip had it that she was disappointed over coming, and was reluctant to accept the gestures of friendship from any of the brave young vultures.

"But she'll soon get over that," the women said. "She'll swallow her pride and settle down to married life like the rest of us. Though if she doesn't do so right away, no vulture is going to bear her across the Lake of Fire."

I thanked the women, and they promised me they would postpone their own crossing until Breath of Clover was somehow cared for. They would find her and try to reason with her.

I flew across the Lake of Fire, then, eager to see how the new colony was progressing. It was good to be flying

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on south again. It was good to have the radiation of the red fires wafting up against my body as I flew across high above the red flames.

It was gratifying to see that the other vultures made the flight readily. Once the taboo had been forgotten, it was not an impossible flight. In fact, there was always a restorative effect upon tired wings, according to my experience —and this I attributed to the radiations.

A sense of expectancy took hold of me as I approached the southern rim—a hunch that something momentous lay waiting for me.

Whence did that feeling arise? Was it because I had not been here for more than a year? Much might have happened in that time—favorable or otherwise.

FOR more than a year the first colonists had been partaking of this eagle-man's paradise with its bountiful game, its sweet mineral springs gushing from the blue chasms, its forests of rugged beauty.

The only reports that had come back to me during my year of absence were the simple grunts and squawks of those vultures who made brief return trips to get the rest of their possessions or to pick up a double armload of vulture boys who had been left behind.

The first vulture I met when I alighted beyond the rim was a well known friend named U-Kawk—a brave young eagle man, well muscled, handsome, a good fighter.

U-Kawk called out to me, "Fire Jump. . . . Good. . . . Good!"

I returned his greeting. I studied him with new interest. In the back of my mind was the problem of Breath of Clover.

"Are you mated yet, U-Kawk?"

"No."

"There is a beautiful Clankolite girl waiting to be brought across. Her name is Breath of Clover. Will you fly back and get her?"

"Yes—get. . . . But not marry."

"I'm not telling you to marry her. She would have something to say about that." I sensed a suppressed excitement in U-Kawk's manner, and added, "What makes you so sure you won't want to marry Breath of Clover?"

"Marry later," said U-Kawk.

"The Clankolite girls will all be gone. We're never going to steal any more."

"Marry later," he repeated.

"How much later?"

"Fifteen years."

I snorted at this answer, which I took to be sarcasm. But on second thought I wondered if it could mean that there was a slow sullen rebellion against my peace terms already brewing. Perhaps a secret agreement to let matters wait a few seasons and then attempt to restore the old predatory habits.

"Go across and bring her, U-Kawk. I want her to get a worthy vulture for her companion and mate."

U-Kawk flew off obediently.

A few moments later I found myself greeting another vulture friend.

"Is it well with you, Kut?" I asked.

"Good! Good! Good!" Kut screamed with happy laughter.

"You are terribly happy. What is it?"

"My woman gives a child."

"Is there anything so remarkable about that?"

"The child is *girl!*" he screamed, jumping up and down.

I scowled at him and flew on wondering what had injured his brain. Kut was obviously mad, I thought, having such outrageous thoughts.

THEN I met Kurf, only to find him insane with a similar happiness.

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"Good! Good! Good! Kurf cried.

"What's so good?"

"New child—*girl!*"

My head was swimming. I was dizzy, my wings wavered. I raced on down the line crying to every winged creature on a perch. Everywhere there was the same uncontrollable excitement. "New child—girl!"

Or sometimes it was a less enthusiastic, "New child—but not a girl. Bad."

Something revolutionary had happened. It was more than I could fathom. But I could not deny that it had happened—not after several proud Clankolite mothers gathered around me proudly displaying their babies — squirming little female vultures, with perfectly formed baby eagle heads, wings, and talons.

I looked from one to another of the mothers, completely nonplussed.

"How did you do it?" I gasped.

They burst out with uncontrolled laughter like silly schoolgirls. But as for the answer — none could give it. The whole colony was as mystified as it was exuberant. And the imaginations of the captive women was something to excite wonderment.

"The taboo was misunderstood," said one of the older mothers. "These stupid eagles have been wrong all the time. To stay beyond the Lake of Fire was wrong. To fly back here was right. . . . Why? . . . We don't know. . . . But we know this new crop of babies will change the eagle man's world."

All the old women nodded solemnly, and the younger ones looked tenderly at their offspring—for they were seeing visions of a future eternal peace. . . .

CHAPTER XX

IT WAS the first time I had ridden in a space ship since the day I landed on the Blue Moon.

The small trim craft was white inside as well as out, and it was so luxurious that a little homesickness for the old comforts of Karloora gripped me.

A genial old lady wearing a black and white uniform served dainty Karloora foods to us in the lower observation room. Far down beneath us the red flames of the Lake of Fire kicked up at the miles of perpendicular basalt walls. An eagle's eye view of that lake had been thrilling enough, but a scientist's eye view was even better.

My host was a scientist. An archeologist. He was young and keen-eyed, and at once rugged and handsome. On the belt of his white trousers he wore a gold eagle emblem—the twin of mine.

His name was Bendetti, and in every respect he resembled his father. But especially in his genial manners and his friendly smile.

"Just as I think I have solved a mystery by digging the answer out of forgotten ruins," he was saying, "your race of vultures moves across to add proof to my findings."

"Do you think," I asked, "that what has happened will continue to happen, generation after generation?"

"I think so," said young Bendetti authoritatively. "The skeletal evidences show that there were both sexes of vultures as long as the race lived to the south of the Lake of Fire. When the gradual migration rounded the west end, the female side of the population began to diminish. The farther north the vultures moved, the more evidences we find of the presence of Clankolite women. The tradition of making raids must have become established back in those years, when otherwise the race would have died out."

"And yet it was the taboo," I said, "that prevented their crossing back to their more favorable region."

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Young Bendetti laughed lightly. "Vicious things, these taboos. Though it's likely that this taboo was based on something sound. It was a necessary taboo as long as they lived to the south of the lake. For if they had crossed to the north they would have ceased to bear girl babies—and some long lost experience must have made them know that."

"But after they gradually moved around to the north, they still held onto the notion that it was wrong to cross."

"Exactly," said Bendetti. "And the taboo guaranteed them a tragedy. They've had it. But fortunately you had the nerve to break the path for their escape. . . . My father used to tell me about you. He believes that Flanger himself stole you to experiment on his commercialized military schemes."

"What has happened to Flanger?"

"Still promoting, the last I heard," said Bendetti.

OUR talk rambled from Flanger back to Bendetti senior, who had come on the first excursion hoping to see me. But now I was assured I would see him again some day, and I was certain he would not regret the hours he spent with me.

Young Bendetti continued to theorize upon the strange scientific phenomena. He was uncertain whether it was the radiations from the Lake of Fire that caused the differences in the proportions of girl babies, or whether it was a mineral content in the food and water to be found in the Blue Crater Region. It might be several years before he and other scientists would find out; but the knowledge would be worth a lifetime of study and experimentation.

Obviously this young scientist was tremendously in love with his work. But all the while I was curious to know certain other things about his love life.

"You said you were taking me across the lake to see a friend of yours," I broke in bluntly.

"Yes—a girl you used to call Tangles. She's missed seeing you on each of our previous trips. I dropped her off near White Tooth Point at her request. She mentioned something about gifts."

"I'm not sure that I'll know her any more," I said. The chills were playing through my spine. "She's probably very different from the girl I used to know, after these years in Karloora."

Bendetti took a small picture from his pocket. My eagle head moved from side to side as I looked at it. If this was Tangles—

"She's pretty!" I gasped.

"Rather—yes."

"And she's *clean!*"

"Of course. What did you expect?"

"And she's all dressed in Karloora clothes. I—I'm afraid I won't know her."

Young Bendetti laughed until I grew embarrassed.

"She's been coming with you each time," I said. "You must be—"

"We're very good friends."

"You're not married to her?"

"Oh, no."

"You love her?"

"In a way—yes. She's a grand girl, always bubbling over with mischief. On my first trip she came as a stowaway, just for a joke. She said she used to sneak rides on growser's tails the same way."

"She loves you?"

"She loves *you,*" said young Bendetti. "Why do you think she came to Karloora in the first place? To tell my father about you. Why was she so anxious to come back with me? To leave gifts for you. Why are we rush-

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ing back across the lake to find her? She loves you, Fire Jump. If you've got any brains inside that eagle head of yours you'll never let her go back to Karloora."

IT WAS evening when we landed on a table of rock within walking distance of White Tooth Point. Bendetti and I hurried through the locks and down the dusty trail. I could see Breath of Clover standing near my observation perch a hundred yards ahead of us. She was peering off in the distance.

It was the first time in what seemed years since I had seen her, and I was amazed that our arrival did not distract her from her dreamy star gazing —or was she studying the fair red glow that could be seen rising off the lake at this time of evening?

It was U-Kawk who bounded over to greet us.

U-Kawk showed signs of distress. He had found the beautiful Clankolite girl, but had been unable to persuade her to go back with him.

"Not go," he said sullenly. "First cry . . . Then talk with women . . . Then run."

"I'll talk with her," I replied and flew across to the foot of my perch.

Breath of Clover greeted me, but it was not easy to decipher her emotions. She had been crying, but she was trying to hide that fact from me. And she had been running. Breathlessly she pointed off to the southward.

"Hurry, Fire Jump. There she goes. Maybe you can catch her. If those old women told me the truth, she's gone to throw herself into the lake—"

"Not Tangles!"

"Yes. They said she came to find you. But you haven't returned her faith-gifts. She could see that, the moment she came to the perch. Then she went running toward the lake. I couldn't catch her—"

I shot into the air and in ten hard strokes was winging it full speed. I could see the tiny figure, more than a mile away and soon it was evident that she was running.

Once I thought she looked back. She must have known the space ship had landed. She must have guessed someone would try to overtake her before she reached the rim of the pit.

The air flooded past me. Already I could feel the warming of the lake's radiation.

THOUGHTS flooded my mind too. I knew that Breath of Clover had never stopped to cry after she heard about Tangles. That weeping had happened beforehand; her tears had been shed for troubles of her own. But the moment she heard that Tangles had been there, and had gone off on this act of desperation, Breath of Clover had forgotten herself and tried to save Tangles.

How could Tangles do such a mad thing? It was not like her—not the Tangles I used to know. It was insane.

I saw her make the leap.

I was within fifty yards of the rim when she leaped over.

Down she went, out of my sight, and for an instant I was gripped by a horror that was almost paralyzing. Everything started to go black.

But I forced myself to keep breathing and keep flying. I swooped down in a wide arc over the edge of the precipice. The red flames were straight below me, and I started the desperate plunge—

I might have flown vertically for more than a mile.

I might have winged down so deep that my wings would have vanished in two bursts of flame.

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But I didn't.

I flew only a few yards—owing to the fact that the moment I swung through my downward arc I heard an outburst of teasing laughter from somewhere near the top of the precipice. The same laughter I had once heard from a dirty-faced scamp of a girl who had stolen a ride on the tail of a growser.

There was Tangles standing on a ledge not more than three yards beneath the point of her jump-off. She was waving at me.

A minute later we were winging it through the evening sky, and she was still laughing.

"I wish, Fire Jump," she said, "that I could learn to read your expressions. Are you really as angry as you look? Or do I see a faint smile at the corners of your beak?"

"I'm much angrier than I look," I said. "I'm thinking of eating you up. How do I know you didn't intend to throw yourself over? How could you be sure there'd be a ledge to catch you?"

"You'll always wonder about that, won't you," she said, adding, "always."

Karloora was showering down its creamy colored light when we returned from a long, aimless circling of the skies and alighted at White Tooth Point.

U-KAWK was still there, waiting with the patient endurance that becomes a true eagle man. But he wanted to start back, for he was eager to know whether any new girl babies had been born during his absence, and with my kind permission—

"Go ahead, U-Kawk. But first, where is Breath of Clover? Is she still crying?"

"Not cry," said U-Kawk. "Laugh."

"Where is she? Where is the ship?"

"Gone . . . I go."

He winged away to the southward. It was not until I found the older women that I got a satisfactory explanation of what had happened. They told Tangles and me that the young man of the ship had been not only attracted by the beauty of Breath of Clover; he had been so fascinated with her that he had made her tell all about herself.

Then he had told her the great news which I had told him—that Flint Fingers had been killed, that Stone Jaw was now the leader of the Clankolites.

And with that news all her sadness melted away.

She wanted to go back. She was eager to see her father. Then the young man of the ship offered to take her back at once.

"You never saw anyone change to happiness so quick," the old women told me, their eyes sparkling. "But Breath of Clover did not know whether she could go. You had once told her, she said, that vultures never let their women go back."

"And what did you say?" I asked the old Clankolite women.

They looked at each other dubiously, and then came out with a full admission. "We told her you had agreed to let her go."

I glanced at Tangles, nestled within my arm, and replied to the women, "You were right." . . .

LIFE was good in the new vulture colony, and all of its population looked forward to interesting times to come.

But now that peace reigned on the Blue Moon our isolation from the Clankolites was not so complete but what now and then rumors and news would seep through from one race to the other.

It was only two seasons later that the story reached us of the fate of the man

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from Karloora who had once schemed to employ both races for military purposes.

This man Flanger, who had moved about on crutches ever since a certain perilous escape during which he dropped to the ground from the end of a claytung wire, had come to the Blue Moon again. A few of his assistants had come with him.

They had come for the purpose of making friends with the vultures. They had intended giving the vultures weapons to renew war on the Clankolites.

But they had failed to find the vultures and so had finally confided in a Clankolite whom they considered to be unscrupulous enough to be friendly.

The Clankolite instructed them on how to attract the vultures. They should station themselves at the edge of a certain forest and should fasten vulture wings to their backs.

Flanger and his associates followed these instructions. But no vultures came. Instead, they were visited by some vicious growsers who inhabited that forest and who were attracted by the display of vulture wings.

A pair of crutches, picked up afterward by a hunter, had been presented to Stone Jaw as a souvenir.

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The Return of the Hun

by WILLIAM J. BRITTAIN

WE WERE inbound from the Caucasus mines with a load of manganese ore, and had dropped out of the strato lanes to make a routine check on the Wild Ones in the western European badlands. We had been cruising near the Rhine for an hour when we saw the fight.

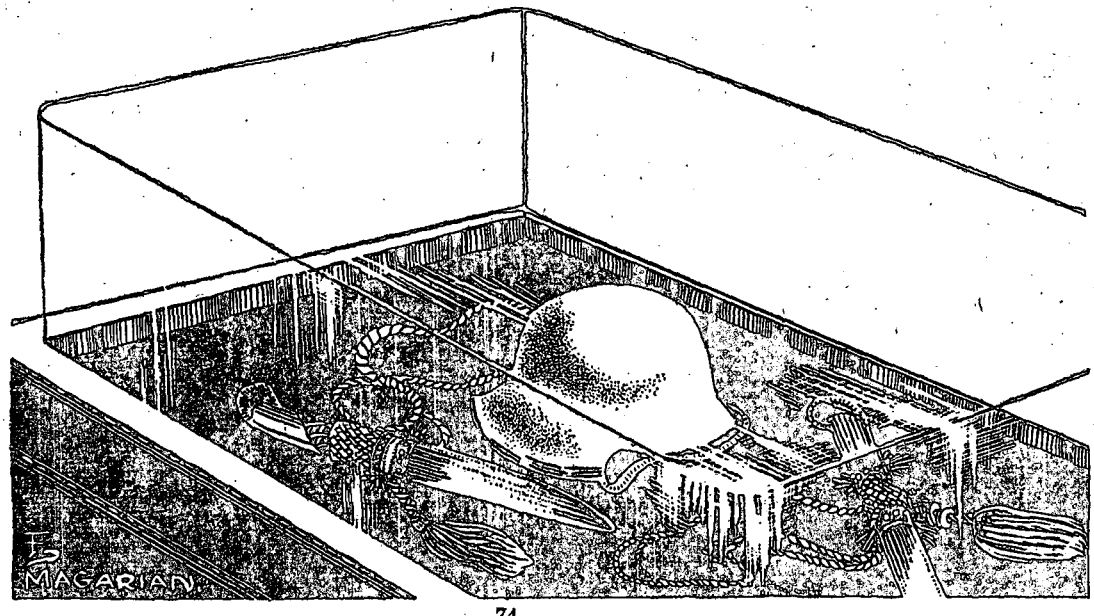
A big band of Wild Ones, more than I had ever seen at one time, had encircled a little hill. We could see them leap from cover, throw their spears at a little nest of rocks atop the hill, and then leap back to safety. Whoever was in the little fort—we could not see them, then—was putting up a stiff battle, because six or seven of the naked devils had not made it back to cover.

The skipper was watching through his glasses.

"Ground speed," he ordered. "Swanson, take over the sonic projector. This looks interesting."

We carried projectors, in case of forced landings in the wastelands. I climbed up into the turret, but the Wild Ones had seen the ship and were scurrying for their warrens. Two men leaped to their feet in the little rock fort, frantically waving at us, and came dashing down the hill as we dropped. We stopped at thirty feet, because in those days we could not launch a ship

Two Nazi officers sent their time machine into the future to seek a weapon to win the war—and found Naziism dead! But perhaps it wasn't really dead . . .



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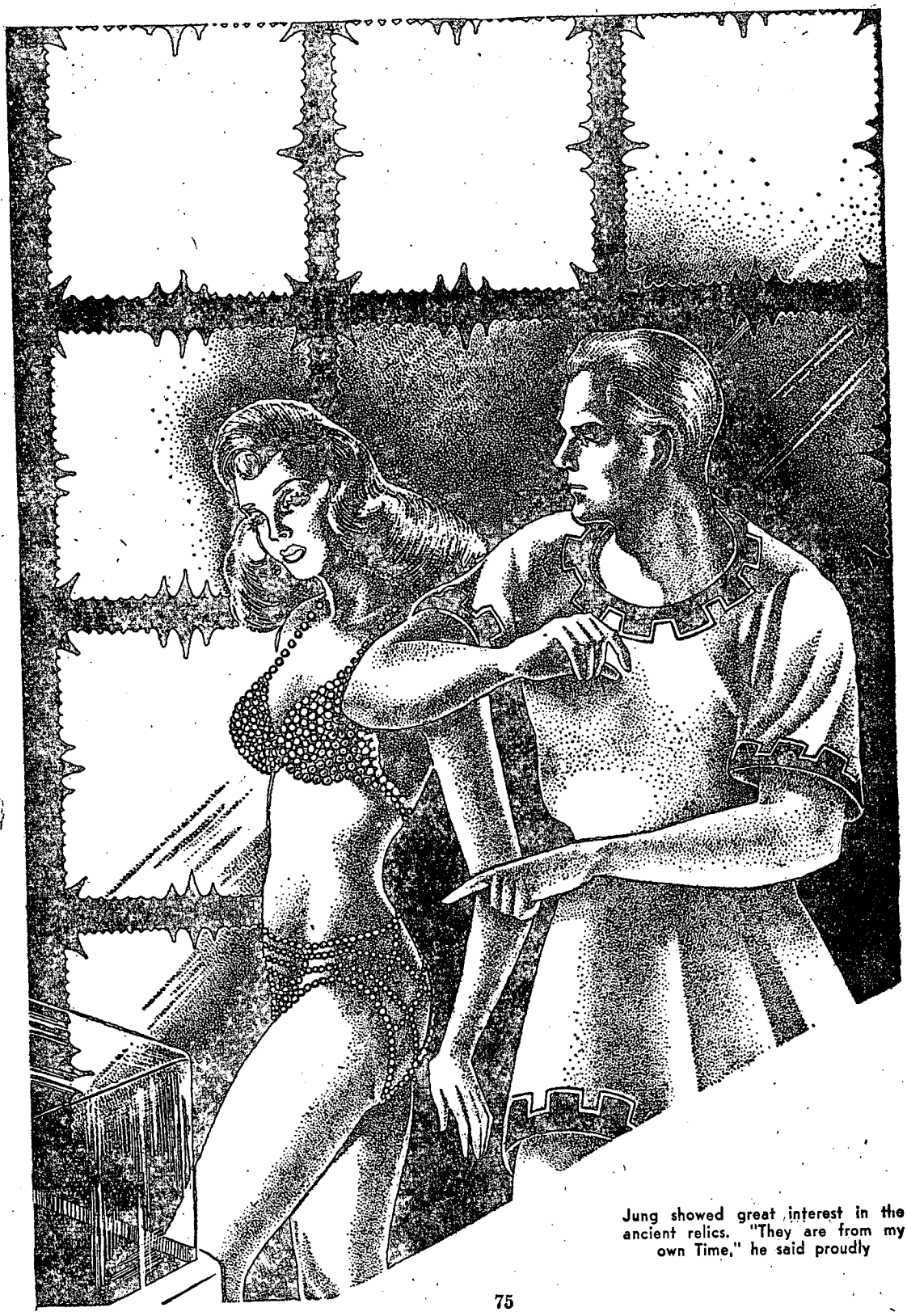

Jung showed great interest in the ancient relics. "They are from my own Time," he said proudly

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without a cradle and recoil plate. Our blasts were idling.

"Queer," I heard the skipper mutter through the audiophone. "They don't look like Wild Ones, but I'm damned if they're Americans. Swanson! Give them the low intensity beam. We'll soon find out who they are."

They dropped like rocks when the beam hit them, and within five minutes a landing crew had them fastened to grapples and they were being hauled into the old tub's belly.

The whole crew gaped at them as they were carried into the ship's hospital. One—it took four men to carry him—was a veritable giant, more than six feet tall, huge and blond with powerful sloping shoulders and a smooth-shaven jaw like a rock. The other, dark, stocky, was a full six inches shorter, but he still was a head taller than the tallest man aboard.

They were wearing, not light knee-length tunics such as we wore, but queer heavy garments that covered their entire bodies, with innumerable straps and belts that supported little containers. Each was burdened with an immense pack.

I was watching the ship's surgeon undress them when one of the landing party handed me a queer, heavy stick.

"They dropped it," he explained.

I must have stared at it a full three minutes before I realized what I held, then I went crazy.

"Captain!" I bawled, waving the thing in the air. "Captain Scott! Look! A projectile gun! Oh, Lord, what a find!"

YOU'VE seen them in the museums. The old books call them rifles; they are long, unwieldy hand weapons that propel a metal pellet through explosive chemical action. I was thinking of it purely as an archeological discovery until I realized that the thing had killed those Wild Ones sprawled on the hillside. That sobered me. While I was probing my mind, trying to place that ancient weapon in its right historical period, the surgeon beckoned to me.

"What do you make of this?" he asked curiously, handing me one of the little cloth caps the strangers had worn. He pointed to lettering inside the cap. I read it, wonderingly. "Wehrmacht 1939 Dusseldorf."

"They must be Wild Ones who stumbled on an ancient cache," I said slowly, but I did not believe it myself. He shook his head.

"Ever see Wild Ones," he replied, "with bodies like these?"

I was examining the cap, a wild excitement rising in me. The thing was almost new! And when I looked at the metal badge fastened to it, my heart almost stopped — for the badge was bright and gleaming. Surely that cap, at least, had not been hidden away through dusty centuries!

I dropped to my knees, pawing through the jumble of equipment, garments and weapons, and found what I wanted in one of the packs. For a moment I just sat there, stunned.

"It's not possible," I finally breathed.

"What's not?" the surgeon grumbled.

"These men . . . I took the plunge, "these men have come from the twentieth century."

He grinned.

"You're crazy."

"No! Look!" I held up my find, a little paper pamphlet, the ink on it black and clear. It bore a strange device similar to that on the cap and other equipment—a spread-winged eagle surmounting a circle, and within the circle a strange hooked cross . . .

The date on the pamphlet leaped out at me. 1940!

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"Could that have survived for five centuries?" I demanded. "It could not have possibly been preserved in any conceivable place but an ancient time capsule, and certainly no Wild Ones can unearth a capsule. No! I tell you, these men have traveled across Time itself! And we have found them in the middle of a desert." I laughed almost hysterically. "I don't imagine they expected to find a desert."

The surgeon was examining the pamphlet, his eyes growing round.

"This thing," he muttered, "is in . . . in German. Yes, it has to be. I've seen similar words in old medical texts. But that language has been dead for three hundred and fifty years!"

That little pamphlet—I learned later that it contained medical hygiene instructions—was irrefutable proof that two German men had catapulted across Time from the fourth decade of the twentieth century to the fourth decade of the twenty-fifth century!

I WAS waiting in the apartment in the Central Government Building, to which the strangers had been assigned, for them to recover from the effects of the sonic beam when Tana joined me. Tana is my sister, and she has all of the beauty in the family. Almost as tall as a man, a full five feet, she looked like anything but the serious student of history that she was.

"I couldn't stay away," she laughed at me, tossing her thick tawny hair out of her eyes. "Just because the Directory assigned you as counselor for them doesn't mean that you'll have all the fun, brother mine. Because I'm staying with you every minute, and when we finish, what a thesis I'll write!"

They were still sleeping. Tana walked to the bed where the blond giant lay, his thick chest rising and falling stertorously. She peered into the strong, heavy face, then stepped back, almost shuddering.

"Ugh," she said. "He looks like a great yellow beast."

"His name is Kapitan Gerhard Wolfgang von Kuhlmann," I told her, stumbling over the unfamiliar consonants. "I found an identification card on each of them. The other is Oberleutant Walter Jung."

She walked to the other bed, and then smiled.

"This one looks like a little boy asleep."

He did at that, with one tanned arm thrown around his dark tousled head, his face peaceful. I smiled at her, then started to study the strong face of the captain.

As I peered at him, curiously, he opened his eyes. I recoiled instinctively. It was like looking from a height into a grey sea, cold, hostile, utterly implacable. His eyes were not sleep-clouded as are most men's when they awaken; he awoke like a wild animal, fully alert. He swept the room with his cold gaze, the translucent walls, the ceiling half open to the sun, the shimmering tapestries, then fixed me with his stare.

He growled something in thick gutturals. I shook my head.

"Do you speak English?" I asked. He reacted as if I had struck him. He surged to his feet, cursing, glaring about the room, unmindful of his nakedness.

"Englische!" he bellowed hoarsely. *"Ach, ist . . ."* Then he staggered, his huge hands going to his head. The beam effect was still working. Tana and I steadied him as best we could, and he sank on the bed, covering himself. He glared up at me.

"Then we are prisoners?" His Eng-

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lish was archaic, stiff and stilted and with a queer accent, but I recognized it as the forebear of our own slurred speech.

"Certainly not," I answered him, puzzled. "You have committed no crime. You are guests of the State, free to do as you wish." I bowed politely. "I am Citizen Anthony Swanson. This is my sister, Citizeness Tana Swanson. We are yours to command."

HIS little eyes were wide with perplexity, then a veil seemed to slip over them, leaving them flat and expressionless.

"Gut," he said shortly. "My comrade?"

I nodded at the other bed. Walter Jung was sitting up, watching us with puzzled curiosity. I repeated the introductions, laughing as he tried to keep himself covered and reach for my hand at the same time. Then he took Tana's hand, and his eyes were wide. Tana smiled, then laughed outright.

"My hand," she reminded him and he blushed furiously, releasing her.

I turned to von Kuhlmann.

"We have an appointment at the Academy of Science," I told him. "Would you care to go?"

He growled.

"Questions, I suppose."

"Not if you do not wish it so. In our land, no man acts against his will, unless to follow his will is harmful to others. But, naturally, we are intensely eager to learn. We know so little of your time. We are sure that you can aid us as we hope to aid you."

He was momentarily startled.

"Aid us? Oh, yes, of course. I see that you know we are from the past, from 1941. What year is this?"

"2440," I told him. He smiled, hugely pleased with himself.

"The setting was for five hundred years," he said. "We did not miss by much."

Tana waited outside while the two Germans slipped into their tunics, grimacing at the shortness of them. I stepped to the wall and depressed the view-control switch. The translucent walls slowly cleared, became transparent.

"New Washington." I gestured to the city spread beneath us. "This is your home as long as you will it."

They gazed at the rolling miles of small compact homes, the graceful public buildings, all set in the cool green of our lawns and parks, with the mighty river in the distance. Von Kuhlmann was unimpressed.

"Pah!" he snorted. "It is like a country village. I expected huge towers, sweeping ramps black with people, the roar of machines . . ."

"We prefer to live in sunlight," I answered. "Our manufacturing units are farther south, but they, too, are surrounded by parks. There are too few of us left on earth to crowd together like cattle."

"I think it is beautiful," Jung protested. "It is peaceful and quiet and . . . and friendly."

Von Kuhlmann's face was cold. He barked something in German, and I could feel the command, and the contempt, in his words. Jung stiffened and his right arm shot rigidly above his head.

"Ja, Herr Kapitan!" he answered woodenly. He did not look at me.

TANA and I were burning with curiosity about the strangers as we strolled through the Park of the Peacemakers to the Academy, but courtesy forbade us questioning them —and they volunteered no explanations. So I told them of our world.

I told them how, when the wars had

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sputtered out in death and misery and there were so few of us left, we built a new civilization there in the Mississipi valley. It was the one small spot in the hemisphere untouched by the Great Plague, the one place where things could grow, where men could live like men.

I explained that the new nation was founded on the principles of peace, individual liberty and security for all men. Unlimited power drawn from the atom, developed as a weapon in the last years of the fighting, guaranteed our material security, and with security, peace and liberty. The great atomic disrupters, I told them, were fed by an intricate transportation system that funnelled the world's metal ores into the hoppers, for metallic resources and coal were the only resources undestroyed by the centuries of struggle. Food was grown in force-plants; some of it was produced from the by-products of the disruptors. I told them that each man's needs were cared for, but that in return it was the duty of each man to serve the State for a period of five years, in an occupation for which he was best fitted—in the mines, the refineries, the disruptor plants, or aboard the transports. And I told them that our people had reached the stars a century before, that we were colonizing both Mars and Venus.

Von Kuhlman's cold eyes glowed as I spoke casually of atomic power, and he asked quickly if he could examine the plants. I promised to take him as soon as possible. But Jung was watching our people as they passed, watching them playing in the park, walking, reading under the trees, and finally he turned to me, frowning.

"There is no strain on their faces," he said gravely. "They are all smiling, or their faces are in complete repose. They are all happy!"

"Certainly!" I laughed at his bewilderment. "There is no need for strain. Our needs are filled. Our daily lives are made smooth by observance of the laws of the State."

"Laws?" Von Kuhlman raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"The Great Law," I answered, "is the most vital. 'Do unto your fellow citizen only that which you would have him do unto you.'"

The German was incredulous, then, seeing I was earnest, frankly contemptuous.

"You are more stupid than I believed," he blurted. "You live an effete, soft life, a life fit for women, not warriors, and you call it happiness." He spat. "Your system if it can even be called a system, is contrary to nature and therefore untenable—it protects the weaklings and saps the strength of the strong."

I agreed heartily.

"Would you return to the law of the jungle?"

"Might is right," he growled. "Those who forget it are destroyed!"

Jung broke in, an angry glint in his eyes.

"But that is the Golden Rule, Herr Kapitan! These people are living by it, have lived by it for years."

The giant threw back his head and laughed, a short, hard barking laugh.

"That's right, Oberleutenant. The Golden Rule. Ja, I well remember how you applied the Golden Rule in Warsaw!"

Jung went white and turned his head away, his eyes troubled. Tana, clinging to his arm, said something in a low voice, but he did not reply.

THE Herr Kapitan glowered truculently at the savants who were questioning him. He seemed to resent

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their interest, their scientific curiosity about the first men to successively travel through Time.

"I know nothing, nothing," he grumbled. "It was purely an experiment. Jung and I volunteered and were chosen. They told us nothing."

"Where is the machine?"

He shrugged.

"Somewhere in the Bavarian Alps south of Munich. I'd have to have a complete map. It's in a crypt, sunk into a mountainside."

But man, can't you give us a hint of the principle behind the machine? It is a great achievement."

He set his massive jaw.

"Nein. We were told only one thing, that the space-time continuum would be momentarily warped by a tremendous surge of power. That means nothing to me."

Dr. Torrance, the grey-headed president of the Academy, leaned forward.

"What happened after you entered the machine?"

"Nothing. I pulled the switch and waited, but the only thing that happened was a play of light in the solenoid and selenium generators. Nothing else. When we got out of the machine, the laboratory was empty, with dust sifted over everything."

Jung, seated beside his superior, took up the story.

"We found only desolation when we came out of the mountain. We had expected . . ." Kuhlman shot him a warning glance, "we had expected to find cities, people, civilization. We wandered north for three weeks, and found only ruins, wastelands, and finally the beast men."

Von Kuhlmann leaned forward, his jaw outthrust, his face suddenly intent.

"What has happened to our people?" he demanded.

Torrance dropped his gaze, then looked full into Von Kuhlmann's eyes.

"They are gone, Herr von Kuhlmann," he said softly, and the German recoiled, his face suddenly livid. "They were destroyed, and all of Europe with them. The nations fought among themselves, they loosed the plagues, they slaughtered each other until even the very earth that gave them life was destroyed. Your people are dead!"

Jung sat deathly still, his eyes unbelieving. Von Kuhlmann leaped to his feet, towering over the astonished scientists.

"*Schweinhunden!*" he bellowed. "You lie! Germany is not dead! You are deceiving me! The Fuehrer said . . ." He stopped, sat down, breathing heavily, his eyes blazing.

"I'm sorry," Torrance said, his voice warm with sympathy. "You yourself saw the wastelands, you marched through it. There is nothing between the Caucasus mines and this little patch of fertile land but desert, ruins and rust. Back in the valleys of Szechuan, high up the Yangtze-kiang, a remnant of the Chinese people still live, with a civilization like ours. That is all. There are no more than than five million human beings on all the earth, Herr Kapitan."

IT HURT to see the big man so crushed.

"Tell us about your Germany," I prompted, hoping to ease the strain. His head came up again, and there was fire in the grey eyes, a fire that spread over the heavy face, transforming it with an inner blaze of exultation.

"Ach, I'll tell you," he breathed. "You emasculated morons, I'll tell you!"

"We rule the earth! We were weak, defeated and humiliated by a cowardly stab in the back, but Wotan sent us the

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Fuehrer, our Adolph Hitler. He spoke to us, he brought us back from the degenerate ways into which we had been led. He made us strong. He gave us revenge to live for—ach, and he gave us glory, to die for!"

He was on his feet again, quivering with a religious frenzy.

"Our armies will conquer the world," he barked, his voice harsh and shaking, "because the Fuehrer has said that we are destined to rule, we are the Masters, the Herrenvolk! The swine of the democracies gabbled like old women of their freedoms and their rights—but did they give rights to German people? Nein! They tried to crush us, to encircle us, to enslave us, they denied us our share in the world's riches.

"They prattled of freedom, but they were afraid to sacrifice for their freedom, to die for their meaningless rights. We, the Germans, sacrificed, we hungered, we submerged our minds and bodies in the tide of German destiny at the command of the Fuehrer, and the Fuehrer sent the tide crashing against the decadent fools who thought to bind us with their stupid chains. And we drowned them!

"You are fools like them, silly, babbling fools mouthing phrases. Prattle on—but know this, it is the strong who win! The cowering weaklings call us brutal. Ja, we are brutal! We glory in it, and we march to victory over the bodies of the degenerate idiots who would not heed our warnings, who tried the patience of the Fuehrer, who would not serve us.

"Today Germany, tomorrow the world! Heil Hitler!"

Von Kuhlmann collapsed in his chair, sobbing with the gust of hatred, of passion that had swept him. His thin lips were foam-flecked. We gaped at him, unbelieving, completely surprised that such could exist.

"Hitler? Hitler?" It was Torrance, his brow knit in calm thought. "Hitler. There were so many conquerors, so many leaders . . . No. I can't recall having ever read the name anywhere . . ."

THE next week was crowded. Tana took complete charge of Jung; when I saw him at all, it was briefly. I suspect that they were accomplishing little in the way of constructive investigation . . .

But von Kuhlmann! The man was insatiable. I showed him all of New Washington, all of our little city-state. We were in and out of laboratories, in and out of transports. I showed him the forcing plants, the conversion plants, the refineries. But it was in the disruptor units and the space-port that he was most interested.

We spent a full day in the disruptor zone, while the German crawled over the machinery, probed into dark places, even operated the uranium flow-control while a smiling engineer stood by. He sketched and made voluminous notes in a little notebook as the unit chief explained principles and details. But at the end of the day he was restless, baffled. He paced up and down the apartment, and finally ripped the pages from his notebook and wadded them viciously with one huge fist.

"Too much," he growled, half to himself. "We could never do it, not in less than five years. The principle, yes, but we have not the materials, the training, ach, and not the time!"

I watched him uncomprehendingly, and he did not explain. The next day we were at the space-port, and he made for the patrol ships with their atomic blast projectors, eagerly demanding an explanation. I told him that the guns

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were used only in space fighting; that in our occasional clashes with the Wild Ones or the Venusian natives, we used the sonic beam projector. He dismissed it contemptuously when I told him it had a range of but two hundred yards. Watching him, I remembered his pretended ignorance of scientific matters when he had appeared before the savants—and remembering, wondered.

I saw Jung later that same day. Or rather, Jung and Tana, as usual. They were sitting on a bench in the park near the Educational Institute, deep in conversation. Tana saw me first.

"We were talking about . . ." she began, "about the development of the ideal of the state after the wars. We . . ."

"Of course," I laughed. "Something very abstract, no doubt." I turned to Jung. He had reddened, was grinning like a schoolboy. "Walter, I'm glad to see your education is progressing so nicely."

He looked at her when he answered, with an all-gone look in his brown eyes.

"It is progressing very well," he grinned. She blushed furiously. I left them there. I had meant to ask Jung if he wanted to attend a lecture that night, but I suspected that lectures, and education, could go smash as far as he was concerned.

It was Tana's idea to go to the museum. Von Kuhlmann grumbled, since I had promised him a visit to the atomic research laboratory that afternoon, but he reluctantly acquiesced. If I had only taken him to the laboratory! So much could have been avoided . . .

WE STROLLED through the halls of the museum, not very interested, laughing at some of the odd relics that had survived the wars, exclaiming at the paintings, the sculpture, the artifacts. Kuhlmann said little, evidently suffering, until we debouched into the long hall that housed the weapons of five thousand years of warfare.

He became almost human, striding among the cases, exclaiming at an ancient blade, a rusted helmet of the East. As we approached the more modern weapons, his excitement mounted, became almost infectious. He was thrilled by an ancient thing he called a machine gun, a squat ugly thing on a tripod, and he explained its workings to me. He gazed lovingly at a pipe-like affair labeled "trench mortar," and clambered about a rusty pile of steel plate that he said was a "tank." Tana watched him and laughed delightedly.

"He's not so bad," she smiled at Jung. "He is like a little boy, playing at war. He just doesn't feel the impact of death and horror."

"The Herr Kapitan is no little boy," Jung growled, and I remember wondering what he meant . . .

We paid von Kuhlman little heed when, with a half-suppressed shout, he discovered an antique atomic blast projector, an early prototype of the ones mounted in our space cruisers. It was at least three hundred and fifty years old, and as absurd to me as the machine gun, but von Kuhlmann almost ran to the thing. Then his enthusiasm died as suddenly as it had been roused. He said something in swift German to Jung. The latter joined von Kuhlmann, and together their eyes swept over the weapon. Then von Kuhlmann's little book was out, and he was sketching rapidly. Jung turned away with a nervous laugh, and we moved on to another section, leaving Kuhlmann there alone.

It was no more than ten minutes

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later that we heard the sound of angry voices from the weapons section. Anger among our people was so unusual that Tana and I turned and ran back, Jung after us.

Von Kuhlmann had slipped under the guard rope and was standing under the old gun. He had opened the breech and withdrawn the blast unit, holding it in his hand. Beside him, a pigmy in comparison with his towering frame, was an aged attendant, protesting volubly against the desecration.

"I'm sorry," I told the German curtly. "You really can't dismantle the exhibits, you know."

"I'll do what I please," he spat at me. "Tell this swine to let me alone!"

At that moment the attendant unwisely tried to wrest the blast unit from von Kuhlmann's grasp. The German roared, his arm swung back, and his fist crashed into the man's face. The old fellow, his mouth a smear of blood, dropped like a stone. I stood there, stunned. It was the first time I had ever seen a blow struck in anger.

We got the raging von Kuhlmann out of the museum and back in the apartment. As we turned to leave, Jung started to join us, but was halted by a torrent of crackling German. He glanced at us apologetically, and returned to his superior. Tana and I went home, bewildered, ill at ease.

IT HAPPENED that night.

I was awakened by voices, by the light in my room. Someone was shaking me violently. I struggled awake grunting, and opened my eyes. It was the captain of the honorary Directory Guard. He shook me again until I pleaded with him. There were other men in the room, and Tana. When I saw her face, dead white, her eyes wide with terror, I leaped to my feet. She flew into my arms, sobbing.

"Tony, Tony," she moaned. "It's Walter. That beast has killed him!"

I looked over her tawny head at the Guard captain.

"Not dead yet," the officer said. "Badly hurt. But there *is* a dead man. The attendant in the hangar on the roof has been murdered, and a government stratocar stolen."

"Kuhlmann!" I gasped. The captain nodded.

When we got to the apartment, Walter Jung had been stretched on the bed. His dark face was twisted in pain, his back arched in agony, but he spoke:

"Tony. Come closer. It was Kuhlmann. Stop him, Tony, stop him.

"We are not innocent guinea-pigs, Tony, as von Kuhlmann would have had you believe. Ah, you people are so good, so naive, you can't see deception! We are soldiers, Tony, ordnance specialists, and we were sent here on a mission of murder."

He moaned softly.

"Raise my head, Tony. That is better.

"We were sent across Time to find a weapon, a weapon powerful enough and easily produced by our science, a weapon that would win the war. With it we could rule the world . . ." He groaned again, faltered, then plunged on, heedless of the blood that trickled from his blue lips. "Kuhlmann found nothing until he saw the old gun at the museum. The other things were magnificent, the disruptors, the turret projectors, but they were too far advanced for us, Tony. Germany needs the weapon now. The others would have taken years to produce. The Reich must have the gun now or perish. She had perished . . . history says so. But von Kuhlmann found the weapons, and he knew that we could easily reproduce it . . . that

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with it we could crush the world.

Last night he told me we were leaving. Tony, Tana, I am a good soldier, a good German. I tried to obey. Ach, my dearest Tana . . ." his hand sought hers, found it, closed on it tightly, "I couldn't go." I saw her tears dropping on the contorted face.

"I could not go back," he repeated. "Not back to blood and hatred and the fear that is always wth us, back to tanks and bombers and children with their heads blown off. I couldn't return to a world where men are machines, blind killing machines like von Kuhlmann. It's dark back there, Tana, so very dark . . . and here it is light and free and there is no black fear to press you into the muck. You are human beings here, with the dignity God gave human beings. When you die, it's not in a stinking hole with your bowels ripped out, or in the smashed wreckage of your home, or choking to death in a burning tank. I told him that I was not going back."

THE dark eyes rolled wildly, then focused on mine, and he smiled, weakly, through the blood.

"Kuhlmann was right in a way," he said. "You are too soft. You let us keep our guns. He just looked at me as I told him, and then he shot me. He thought I was dead. Tony, Tony, don't let him get away. He's mad! He wants to change history!"

That was it. There was a bursting light in my skull. Change history! But that meant . . .!

"We'll get him," I said. "Where is he?"

His voice was fading, it was hardly a whisper, and his eyes were fixed on Tana's face.

"The Berghof," he gasped. "Berchtesgaden. Sanctuary of the Fuehrer. The laboratory is in the mountain. . . ." He sighed, shuddering. "Please don't cry, Tana."

I spun on the Guard officer.

"Get a strato cruiser ready for take-off," I snapped. "A fast one, and armed. Don't ask questions now. We leave immediately!"

"But the Directory . . ." he started to protest.

"I'll take care of the Directory," I said grimly. "Get moving."

I turned back to Walter Jung. I saw where the vicious slugs had smashed into him. His middle was a soggy mass. Then I saw the pool on the floor, and the scarlet trail wavering from the pool to the door. One of the Guardsmen answered my unspoken question.

"Yes," he said. "He crawled to the door and gave the alarm."

THANK God, we found him.

Our cruiser was fast, faster than the stratocar he had stolen. We spotted the ship in a little clearing nearly two miles from the peak known as the Berghof, from which a man had once ruled all of Europe . . . Von Kuhlmann must have thought Jung dead and pursuit impossible, or he woud have risked a crash landing on the mountain itself.

He was picking his way along an ancient, crumbled road up the mountainside when he saw him. He saw us at the same time, and started to run. The cruiser commander watched the running figure narrowly.

"We'll never be able to land," he muttered. "We'll have to get him before he finds the entrance."

Kuhlmann was already looking wildly about him as we descended. Air currents whipping between the jagged hills buffeted the cruiser, but that blessed captain put her down, slowly, carefully. Kuhlmann sud-

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denly darted off the faintly visible road.

"Hell," the captain said. "That must be it. By the big boulder."

I saw it, a gleam that might mark a steel door. It was barely two hundred yards above and to the left of the running man. He dropped the rifle he had been clutching, preferring speed to an attempt to fight it out. It meant everything to both him and us . . .

I shouldered a crewman away from the sonic beam projector.

"My job," I muttered. "Closer, bring it closer." The ship swung in a slow arc, and through the sights I saw von Kuhlmann's exertion-reddened face turned toward us. Then we were in range.

It was a temptation to kill him there, to addle his brains with the full intensity of the beam, but the Law was too strong in me. I could not take the Law into my own hands. I gave him the low intensity beam. For a moment I thought I had missed, for he kept running, crouched low. Then he threw up his arms and sprawled headlong, jolting against the rocky mountainside.

I leaned weakly against the gun mount. A few minutes more . . . If Jung had not spent the last of his ebbing life to crawl to the door and raise the alarm . . . I shuddered. Walter Jung had saved our world, had saved his Tana, but he had died doing it.

MY PART in it ended before the red-draped bench of justice in the hall of Freedom, where I told the seven Tribunalists of the last words of Walter Jung. Others followed, the museum attendant with his bandaged mouth, an engineer from the disruptor plant, a nervous gunner from the space-port, and finally my Tana, very straight and proud.

And at last von Kuhlmann himself marched stiffly to the bench, his powerful body rigid at attention, his cold eyes fixed on space.

Old Judge Cannon was Master Tribunalist that year. He regarded the man before him gravely.

"Have you anything to say, Herr Kapitan?"

The German shrugged.

"What is there to say. We had thought to find our German people here, had hoped that they might help us; instead, we found enemies. I gambled and lost."

"You have murdered two men," the judge said. "One was an American, the other your own comrade, whom you condemned to death because he did not agree with you.

"Your actions in the two weeks since you came among us, as described by witnesses, brand you as even more dangerous to our society than the Wild Ones from whom we rescued you. They kill for food; you kill for something you call duty to the Fatherland. Mankind no longer recognizes any Fatherland, Herr Kapitan."

The level voice rolled on, implacably.

"But we cannot pretend that you are on trial for murder. Your threat to society is far greater than the threat of a common murderer."

There was a gasp from the still audience, and von Kuhlmann frowned, uncomprehending.

"You cannot return to your own time, Herr Kapitan," the Tribunalist said slowly and distinctly, "because you carry the seeds of our destruction! *The future cannot affect the past without in turn destroying itself!*

"HISTORY has been written. It is written that your fuehrer, your jungle law, your very people perished

(Continued on page 109)

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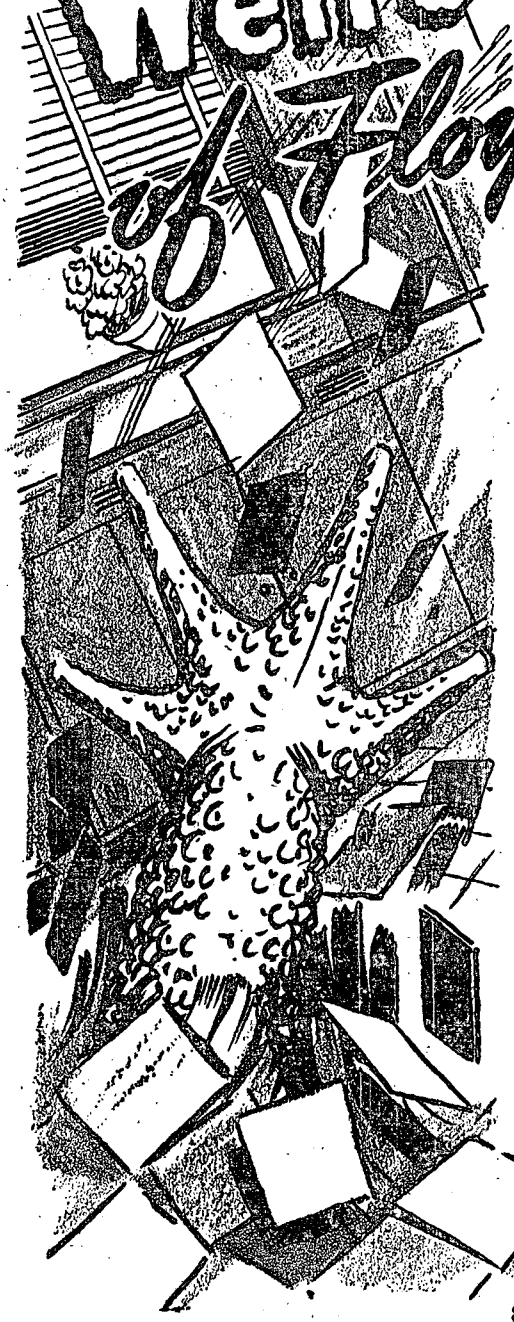
The Weird Doom of Floyd Scrilch

by ROBERT BLOCH



I HAD almost finished with my meal over at Jack's Shack. In fact, I was half-way between my last cup of coffee and my first bicarbonate of soda. Shaking the gravy off my newspaper, I unfolded it and began to read.

Suddenly a hand descended and brushed the pages aside. I looked up into the startled face of Lefty Feep. His wildly rolling eyes were staring at the discarded paper with a look of intense loathing.

"Remove it away," he grated. "Grab loose from that!"

I raised my eyebrows as he lowered his hips into a seat.

"What's the matter, Feep?" I asked. "Does the sight of the news upset you so much?"

"News?" echoed the eccentric Mr. Feep. "It is not the news which upsets me at all. It is the advertisements

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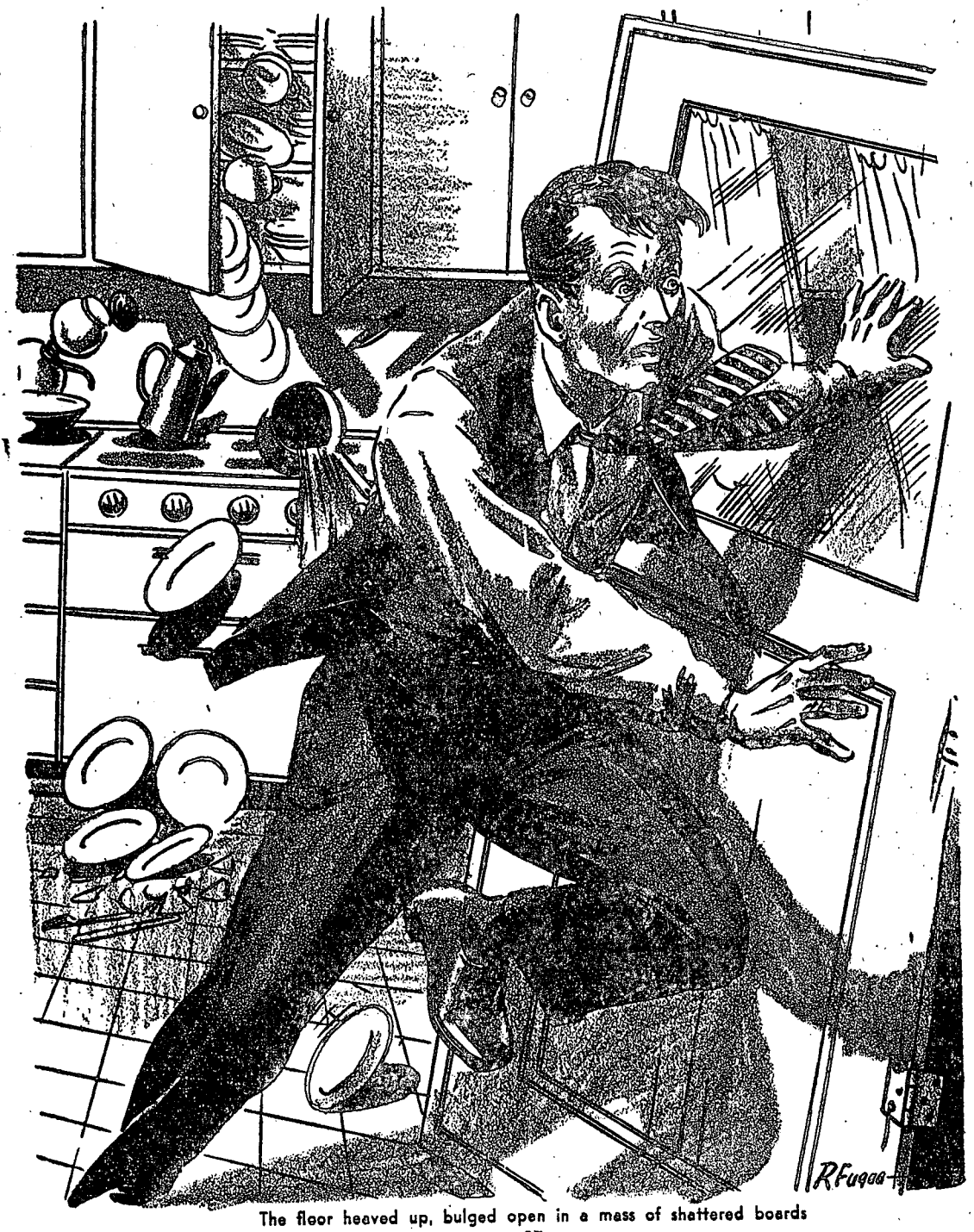
Lefty Feep really ran into something when he met the "average man" the advertisements are always aiming at! He was too average!



The floor heaved up, bulged open in a mass of shattered boards

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that drain the rosy color from my handsome face. I can not bear to look at them."

For the first time I foresaw that I was going to get into an argument with my friend.

"So you're just another highbrow, eh?" I said. "Just another one of those know-it-alls who run around pointing their fingers at the advertising business. Don't you realize what advertising has done for this country? How it has revolutionized business, brought new products and better products forward to the average consumer, given ethics to commerce? Advertising today is more than a profession—it's an art, and a science. The American public owes a debt of gratitude to advertising for—"

"Yeow!" yelled Lefty Feep, quite suddenly. His hands covered his ears as he rocked back and forth in his seat. In a moment he regained composure and leaned forward.

"Please," he whispered. "Pretty please, with ketchup on it. Do not mention that word to me. It gives my dimples goose-pimples."

"Why?" I asked. "What harm has ad—all right, what harm has commercial display ever done to you?"

"Not a bit," Feep answered. "It is not because of myself that I ache and shake. I am merely thinking of what advertising does to poor Floyd Scrilch."

"Floyd Scrilch?"

"Perhaps I better tell you about Floyd Scrilch from the beginning," said Lefty Feep. "It will teach you a lesson."

"I'm sorry, Feep," I said. "But I've got to be going. Heavy date. Some other time, perhaps?"

"Well," Feep shrugged. "If you insist."

He pulled me back into my seat and held me there firmly. Then, plunging his elbows into the butter plates, he began.

* * *

WHEN I first meet up with this Floyd Scrilch, I do not pay any great attention to him. He is that kind of personality. A nobody from nowhere. Strictly a dud. When he walks into a room it is just like somebody else walks out. You don't even know he's there even after you look at him. His face is as empty as a Jap's promise. He never opens his mouth between meals. He is so shy he never looks in the mirror when he shaves. He is what the psychologists call an introtwerp, if you follow me.

He hangs out around the poolroom, and also around the elbows. His clothes are a model of what the well-dressed scarecrow doesn't wear. Also he is very puny. In fact, he is so thin that when he has a toothpick in his mouth it looks like he is hiding behind a tree. One glance at him and you know he cannot lick his weight in wild flowers. In fact, one day I am standing in the pool parlor when he weighs himself and I see he only tips the scales at 84 pounds. Not stripped, either, because the poolroom is crowded.

That is the first time I have anything to do with Floyd Scrilch. He notices I am watching him, and he turns around and hands me a sick smile.

"I do not seem to be so healthy," he gets out.

"At least you won't be taken by the draft," I console him.

"I always get pneumonia from drafts anyway," he sighs.

"Why don't you visit a croaker?" I inquire.

"A what?"

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"An undertaker's understudy. A pulse-promoter. A doctor."

He shakes his head.

"No use," he tells me. "All the doctors give me up for dead long ago. The last medico who examines me says my lungs look like a couple of tea-bags and my heart only beats to mark the hour."

I feel sorry for this weak but meek little guy, and I want to pat him on the shoulder, only I am afraid he will collapse.

But Gorilla Gabface does not share my sentiments. He is watching this Floyd Scrilch hang around his poolroom for the last week, and just now he waddles over to where Scrilch is standing and grabs him by the collar, which rips.

"Listen, jerk," says Gabface. "You got a job?"

Scrilch shakes his head.

"No," he mumbles. "Nobody will hire me."

"You got any money?" Gabface sneers, shaking Scrilch up and down like a dice-box until his teeth roll sevens.

"No money," Scrilch chatters.

Gabface grunts.

"That is the way I figure it, too," he says. "And I do not wish for my poolroom to become a Rescue Mission. So I fear I shall invite you to get the blazes out of here."

GABFACE sort of emphasizes his remarks by picking Scrilch off the floor and tossing him through the door. He lands someplace out on the curb, and when I run out to see what happens he is still bouncing. I catch him on the third bounce and pick him up again.

"That is a mean thing to do," I console him. "Gorilla Gabface is no better than a skunk in wolf's clothing. If I am you I go back in and give him a good beating."

Scrilch sighs.

"I can not beat up an eggnog, let alone a big ape like that," he tells me. "But I only wish I can peel his orange for him some day. Only it is no use, I guess. I am just a rundown weakling. Nobody ever worries about me. I got no friends, no girl, no job. I just as soon go home and put my head in the oven, only the gas company turns it off on me."

Then I get an idea. I have a newspaper in my hand, fanning Scrilch with it to bring him around, and I happen to glance at the page. And I see the advertisement.

It is a big muscle-building ad. I grab Scrilch by the hair.

"Listen to this!" I holler.

"Nuts!" says Joe Stronghorse in the ad. "In seven days you can have a body like mine!

"You wouldn't think to look at me that I am just a 92-pound weakling? Yet I have no muscles painted on. I am just a nobody, but my body is as good as anybody's. You can possess the same muscular strength.

"Let me tell you how you can add three inches to your biceps, eight inches to your calves, sixteen inches to your chest—or bust!

"No complicated exercises! No harsh laxatives! Earn big easy money at home growing hair on your chest in your spare time!

"Send for my exercise system today! A free tiger-skin included with every order! I will build you a powerful body in three weeks, or your muscles refunded. This course guarantees a powerful physique. It will even make your breath stronger!"

Anyhow, it reads something like that. And when I spill this to Floyd Scrilch his eyes light up. He looks at the

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picture of Joe Stronghorse and a grin spills down his chin.

"Say," he whispers. "Do you think it will work for me?"

"All you got to do is tear out this coupon," I tell him.

"I'll do it!" he shouts. "Yes sir, I'll do it!"

Then his face falls. "Can I ask you one favor, Mr. Feep?" he gulps.

"Sure. What is it?"

"Will you please tear out the coupon for me? I'm too weak to do it myself."

SO that is how Floyd Scrilch answers his first advertisement. I forget about him, in a couple of weeks, because I do not see him at the poolroom any more.

I am playing a little game on the first table one afternoon about a month later when an elephant flies over my head.

I do not notice this at first, but then I hear the elephant trumpeting, so I look up and see that it is none other than Gorilla Gabface. He is flying through the air and traveling very fast. He does not even stop to go out the door, but plows right through the plate glass window. Then he sits down very carefully on the sidewalk and pulls splinters out of his ears.

I turn around to the back and duck very quick, because two other personalities are doing a nonstop flight my way. They land up against the wall and pause for a nap.

And I hear a big booming voice say,

"Any other goon want a trip to the moon?"

The rest of the mob just stands there very quiet indeed while a broad-shouldered little guy walks out from between them. I take a good look and then another. Because I recognize none other than Floyd Scrilch.

But he is plenty changed. He has big arms and a broad chest, and looks like he weighs 170 in muscles alone. He walks over to me and yells,

"Hello, Feep—glad to see you! Put 'er there."

"Ouch!" I remark, shaking hands. He has a grip like a politician.

"I want to thank you for what you do for me," he says. "Ever since I mail that coupon, I feel like a new man. Once I get those lessons they do wonders for me. A month ago, if I want to tear a telephone book in half, I have to do it one page at a time. Today I can tear a telephone booth in half."

He slaps me on the back and I cave in.

"Now I settle with this Gorilla person, I feel like celebrating. How about coming along with me for a little drink?"

"O.K.," I tell him. "But aren't you hard up for money?"

He laughs.

"Not since I answer the advertisement," he tells me.

"The muscle ad?"

"No. The other one. About entering the big $5000 prize contest. I enter it and win."

SURE enough, when we get outside I notice Floyd Scrilch is wearing a new English burlap drape suit, and he leads me over to a big car with actual new tires on it.

We go over to Daddy's Tavern, where you always find about eight to the bar, and have a drink on Scrilch's new success.

"It is a funny thing," he tells me. "Ever since you point out that ad to me, I study advertisements and answer them. And every ad I answer works out for me."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, take like this ad about rais-

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ing a truck garden at home. My neighbors send for some seeds a long time ago and try it out, and they tell me nothing comes up. Me, I send in just ten days ago and already my garden is full of carrots and tomatoes and peas and radishes and such articles. It is like magic.

"Then, just for fun, I send in for another ad which tells about getting rid of unsightly pores. And now look at me. Go ahead, look at my face."

I stare at him real close. Sure enough, there is not a pore on his face. The skin is closed up tight all over.

"You see?" he tells me. "I got no more pores than an empty bottle. I got a hunch I am going places with these advertisements. For some reason they just work out right for me."

I have to leave just then, because I have a heavy freight date. And when I duck out, I do not see Floyd Scrilch again for weeks.

This is because I am all the time riding these heavy freight dates. I happen to be mixed up with a torrid tomato. I call her Pearl, because her old man is a bad oyster.

I am not a personality who usually makes like a wolf after the little red riding hoods, but this dame has me dizzier than a Joe Louis left. I am almost on the point of hanging a ring on her finger, even if it means she will then be leading me by a ring through my nose. We do the old dine and dance routine every night, and she has old Lefty Feep's name down in the number 1 spot on her hit parade. We are closer together than the Gold Dust Twins—and prettier, too.

SO WHEN she calls up one night and asks me to take her out, I give her the nod, quick.

"Will you take me down to the Sunset Roof?" she asks. "I hear there is a new piano player there that can really barrelhouse the boogie in a lowdown doggy way."

She is just crazy for music and culture like this, see?

Well, the Sunset Roof is very high in its class and also in its price, but who am I to refuse Pearl anything her little ticker desires?

So I tell her sure, and pick her up after dinner, and take her down to the Sunset Roof. I bring her a lovely orchard to wear on her dress, and I hire a taxi, and I pay the stiff cover charge without a squawk, and I give her the old routine, so by the time we sit down at the table she is practically in my lap. She is giving me the gaze—you know, the old "we-can-buy-our-furniture-on-the-instalment-plan" look, and I am going for it three ways. Hook, line, and sinker.

Then the floor show starts, and the slush melts all of a sudden. Because that piano player she is so crazy to hear wheels out his infant grand and begins to polish ivory.

"Listen to that man play!" squeals Pearl. So I listen. He is really a gee with the keys, and everybody is quiet while he meddles the pedals under a blue light all alone.

When he chalks up his numbers, there is a lot of palm-pounding, and the lights go on, and Pearl yaps,

"Isn't he just like Eddy Duchin?" So I take a squint at the face and shake my head fast.

Because this piano player is not like Eddy Duchin. He is not like Rachmaninoff either. But he is exactly like my old friend Floyd Scrilch!

In fact, he is Floyd Scrilch, in a tuxedo. He spots me when he is coming off the floor, and runs over.

"Well, it is Lefty Feep!" he gurgles. "And with a charming companion." He bows like a movie extra.

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So I make with the introductions and he drapes his creases in a chair at our table.

I can not resist asking him the natural question, which I do.

"What are you doing here?" I get out. "Since when do you manicure a keyboard?"

He turns and gives me a big smile.

"A month ago I am ignorant of music," he admits. "The only notes I can read are the ones I get from my creditors. I think a sharp is a card player and a flat is some place you live in. Then I pick up this magazine and read the ad. *They Laugh When I Sit Down At the Piano.* It tells how you can learn to play in ten easy lessons, or five hard ones. So I mail the coupon, get my lessons, and right away I am so good I figure I can get a job. So I come up here and they hire me. It is sensational, no?"

HE TALKS to me, but he looks at Pearl. She giggles.

"Why, Mr. Scrilch, you must be a virtuoso."

"Never mind my private life," he tells her, with an enchanting leer. "And why be so formal? Just call me Floydie." His eyes light up like payoff numbers on a pinball machine.

"You just answer the ad and you get what you want, huh?" I ask.

But Floyd Scrilch is not paying any attention to me. He is too busy casting the old goo-goo glance at Pearl.

"What?" he mumbles.

"I say what you got in your hand?" I inquire.

"Why, Pearl's arm," he tells me. And he has. "Pearl," he whispers. "A lovely name. Pearl, you are too good to cast yourself before swine."

This sounds like a dirty crack of some kind, but Pearl just giggles and wiggles, and I see the handwriting on the wall. Also on the check.

"Shall we waddle out of here?" I ask her.

"No, I want to stay. Floydie here says we're going to have lots of fun," she simpers.

So that is the way it is. Floyd Scrilch sits there in his tuxedo, with his big broad shoulders waving and his hair slicked down, handling my tomato like she comes from his own vine.

I get up to go. I should be sore, but for some reason I am more interested in how he does it. In fact, I have a little suspicion when I see his hair. I can not resist bending down and whispering to him before I exit.

"Tell me the truth, Scrilch," I mutter. "Do you also answer one of these ads which tell you to buy hair tonic that makes you irresistible to women?"

He grins.

"You guess it, Feep," he admits. "I just mail the coupon and in comes the stuff to put on my hair, and now wherever my hair goes, women get in it."

I shrug and sneak off. I make up my mind right then and there to forget Pearl and this guy Scrilch.

But this is not so easy to do. Because how can you forget a guy with hair three feet long?

THAT is the way Floyd Scrilch's hair is when I bump into him on the street a few weeks later.

He is running down the block wearing a purple nightgown, and a big shock of long bushy air is tangled all over his dome.

In fact, he bumps into me and I get a mouthful of the stuff. I chew a while and then let go and Scrilch recognizes me.

"Don't tell me," I say. "You figure you have falling hair so you send in for

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a hair restorer and this is what happens."

"Right," he says. "It almost worries me, the way these ads come true. I begin to think they overdo things for me a little."

"But why the purple nightgown?" I ask.

"That is no nightgown," he comes back. "That is a smock."

"Smock?"

"Sure. All artists wear smocks."

"Since when are you artistic?"

"Since I get this long hair. It gives me the idea. All guys with long hair are artists. So I happen to be looking through a magazine and I see this ad.

"Be an Artist!" it says. And there is a picture of an animal down below it. Get Out Your Easel and Draw This Weasel, it states. And it says that the guy who draws the best weasel gets a free art course from this school, by mail. Now me, I think a palette is something you have in your mouth, and a brush is something you have with the law. But I draw, and I win the course, and every lesson works out. In fact I am way ahead of the lessons. I get some oil paints and start to work three weeks ago. I quit my job at the Sunset Roof and take up painting in a big way.

"Last week I have about twenty paintings done. And the big art critic, Vincent van Gouge, happens to drop into my place and—"

"Wait a minute," I cut in. "Since when do guys like art critics come to see you? You are not so popular as that."

Scrilch smiles.

"I am since I answer that ad about Be the Life of the Party," he tells me. "I win friends and influence people all over the place. So they are always running around to see me. Anyway, this van Gouge drops in, takes one look at my paintings, and tells me I got to have an opening."

"You tell me he is an art critic," I object. "So why does he give you advice like a doctor?"

"You don't understand. He means an opening—an exhibition of my paintings. In fact he gets up some sponsors, and today I have twenty paintings hanging down in the art gallery up the street. So I put on my smock and go down there now to the big reception. I am going to be famous. I answer the right ads."

By this time I am a little dizzy. In fact I am so dizzy I decide to go down to the art gallery with Scrilch and see what this is all about.

ON THE way down I ask him about Pearl. He does not even remember her name.

"I am so popular," he babbles. "Like the ads say, I have friends and invitations galore."

I just groan.

When we get to the art gallery I groan again. Because I see Scrilch's paintings.

There are twenty of them, all right, and they look like two sets of ten nights in a barroom. Never in my life do I see such screwy drawings, and I am a fellow who goes in a lot of phone booths.

But there is a big gang of society people walking around and making bleats over the things. Mainly they stand around a big painting at the end. It is a study of two goldfish with skis on, waiting for a street car at the North Pole during a thunder shower. Anyhow, that is the way it looks to me.

But not to the society crowd.

"Look!" yaps one old babe. "It reminds me of Picasso in his blue period."

"Blue, lady?" I tell her. "He must be ready for suicide."

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The old babe sniffs and trucks away from there.

I turn to Scrilch.

"What kind of stuff is this?" I ask. I point to another picture. "How about that one? It looks like a kangaroo walking a tightrope over a garbage dump with Mayor La Guardia in its pouch reading a newspaper."

"You do not understand," Scrilch shrugs. "This is all surrealism."

"You and your sewer realism," I sniff. "If you ask me, the only things you can draw is your pay and your breath."

Scrilch puts his finger to his lips.

"Not so loud," he tells me. "Lots of important people here. They're all very much impressed."

"Depressed, if you ask me," I come back.

"I am sorry you don't like it," he tells me. But perhaps you will like my writing better."

"Writing?"

"Why of course. I am writing the Great American Novel. I answer an ad just this week. *Shake a Leg and Be Another Shakespeare! Just Clip This Coupon And Learn To Write!* So I am only on my third lesson, but yesterday I start my novel. It is almost half through already."

I listen to this and start foaming at the mouth like a beer keg. And I am not the only one.

A LITTLE short fat personality stands right behind us. Now he taps Scrilch on the shoulder and stares at him. He is wearing a heavy pair of cheaters, with enough glass in them to cover a store window.

"Pardon me," he croaks. "But is it not Floyd Scrilch the artist whom I have the honor of addressing?"

"Right."

"And do you not just remark that in addition to your remarkable gifts as a painter, you are also a *literateur?*"

"Naw, I write stuff."

The little goggle-eyes smiles.

"Really?"

"That isn't the half of it," I butt in. "He is also a piano player, a social lion, and an all-around athlete."

"Wonderful!" breathes the goggle-eyes. "How I wish I might psychoanalyze such a genius!"

Then he introduces himself. He turns out to be none other than Doctor Sigmund, the psychiatrist — better known as Subconscious Sigmund.

Subconscious Sigmund grabs Scrilch by the collar.

"How do you manage to cope with such versatility?" he asks.

"I just take a little bicarbonate."

"I mean to say, how is it that you are so accomplished in so many different fields of endeavor?"

"Oh," blurts out Scrilch. "I just answer advertisements and they work out for me."

Subconscious Sigmund stares.

"You mean you just clip out advertising coupons that offer to teach you things and you learn them?"

"Sure."

"Then, Mr. Scrilch, I beg of you— permit me to psychoanalyze you at once."

"Does it hurt?"

"Certainly not. I merely take you to my office and ask you a few questions. I wish to probe your unconscious."

"You wish to what my what?"

"Look into your inner mind. You seem to be a most remarkable man."

Well, Scrilch is a sucker for flattery. The end of it is, he agrees, and we go off to the psychiatrist's office together.

"Come with me, Feep," Scrilch says. "I do not wish to get my brain drained without protection."

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SUBCONSCIOUS Sigmund has a swell office downtown, and he takes us into a nice private room and we all sit down and have a drink.

"Now," he says, rubbing his hands together. "I am going to ask you to sit down here, Mr. Scrilch." And he puts Floyd Scrilch in a soft chair. Then he turns out all the lights except one lamp, which shines in Scrilch's face. "I will now ask you to answer a few questions," he purrs.

It is just like a high class third-degree.

So he begins to ask questions and Scrilch answers him. And now I see what Subconscious Sigmund is doing. He is pumping Scrilch for his whole life history. And the story comes out. About what a dull life Scrilch leads as a kid. About how nobody ever pays any attention to him, how he is just an average jerk.

And then Scrilch tells about the advertisements. How he answers the first one and gets muscles. About answering the piano-playing ad and getting lessons and being a wizard on the piano. About how he becomes irresistible to women like the hair ad tells him. About his hair growing with scalp restorer. About the painting ad and the writing ad and the life of the party ad.

Subconscious Sigmund is amazed. I can see it. He walks around Scrilch grunting and coughing and chuckling, and then he stops.

"I see it all," he whispers. "It is truly remarkable! Scrilch, you are that mythical cipher, that abstract integer, that legendary personification—the typical average man! The forces of heredity and environment have for once conspired to blend perfectly the component elements of physique and mentality into the pure norm!"

Scrilch gives him the double take.

"What does this mean without pig Latin?" he inquires.

"It means you are the man all these ads are written for," Subconscious Sigmund tells him. "You are the average citizen these ads are slanted to appeal to. You are the normal man on which these preparations and lessons and exercises and products are designed to work. On a lesser personality or a greater one, they never succeed so fully. But by some kinetic miracle, you are the one person in the world who is perfectly attuned to advertising formulae. It is almost magical. The very words and phrases advertisers use come true in your case."

"You mean if an ad comes out saying you can live forever, I might live forever?"

"Who knows?" Sigmund comes back. "You are physiologically and psychically attuned to the vibrationary reflexes induced by advertising."

IT WORRIES me," Scrilch confesses.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, lately, the ads work *too* good."

"*Too* good?"

"That's right. I mean, I learn piano playing, but I become a master. I take up drawing, and right away I'm a great artist. I tackle writing, and I write half a novel in one 12-hour day. I send for a hair restorer and I get too much hair. I try to attract friends and women and I have too many friends and too many women. See what I mean? Something is working so that I just seem to get *too much.*"

"So? That is most interesting, my friend."

"Sometimes I wonder if I answer the wrong ad, will it kick back on me? Will I get too wealthy or too strong or too talented?"

"I see," mumbles Subconscious Sig-

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mund. "Over-compensation. A most illuminating development. We must probe further."

"What you going to do, Doc?" asks Scrilch.

"Just look at me," Subconscious Sigmund says. He sits down in front of Scrilch and begins to stare at him with those big cheaters wobbling.

I catch on right away. He is trying to put Scrilch to sleep. He talks to him and keeps the light shining in his face all the time, and he stares away and waves his arm around a little.

Scrilch just sits there.

Subconscious Sigmund stares harder and waves more. He begins to sweat.

Scrilch just sits there.

Subconscious Sigmund's eyes pop out under his goggles. His hands tremble. He sweats plenty.

Scrilch just sits there.

And all of a sudden, Subconscious Sigmund stops mumbling. His pop eyes go shut. His hands drop in his lap. He slumps down in his chair. Then he tumbles off on the floor and just lies there.

Scrilch gets up.

"Come on," he says. "Let's get going."

"But what about Subconscious Sigmund?"

"We'll leave him be," Scrilch tells me. "Can you imagine," he says, in a disgusted tone of voice. "This psychiatrist tries to *hypnotize* me! Me, when just the other day I answer that swell ad about *Hypnotism Made Easy!*"

THAT is the last I see of Floyd Scrilch for many a week. I do not hear anything more about his painting or his writing or his piano-playing. I do not see anything in the papers. I figure maybe he answers an ad on how to be a hermit or something, and let it go at that.

But one afternoon I am at the pool hall, minding my *ps* and cues, and a hand taps me on the shoulder.

I turn around and see Floyd Scrilch. His hand still taps me, because he is trembling. And because I do not recognize him there at first.

Floyd Scrilch is pretty pale. He looks thinner, and there are a couple rings under his eyes I would not like to see on bath tubs.

"Feep," he whispers. "You got to help me."

"Sure, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to come out to my house," he mutters. "We're going to burn some ads."

"Burn some ads?"

"Sure. All of the ads. All the ones I answer and all the ones I plan to answer. Get rid of them. Before they get rid of me."

I give him a long stare and see he means it.

"There's a taxi waiting outside," he says. "Come on. There's not a minute to lose."

We hop in and drive away. It is a long ride.

"Make with the explanations," I request. "What happens to you? Why don't I see you around?"

"If I am around once more, I am dizzy," Scrilch tells me. "It is terrible. I have no peace. Friends calling me up. Women rushing in to visit me. Art galleries phoning. Agents after my book. And look!"

He is wearing a hat, and now he yanks it off. His hair falls out. So help me, it is six feet long!

"You see?" he mutters. "It won't stop growing! Nothing stops any more. Just for fun I send in my picture to a movie talent bureau that advertises. I win a Hollywood contract. I win another contest. But I can

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not go away. I am almost too muscle-bound to walk, now!"

He waves his arm, and his sleeve rips. A bicep sticks out and he pushes it back.

"You see? Ads are good for everybody else, but not for me. They work too well. That is why I run away. I have to get away from people, from women, from advertising.

"That is another thing. A compulsion. That's what Subconscious Sigmund calls it. Every time I see an ad now, I must answer it.

"So I leave my studio and get myself a house in the country. I must. And that is where things go wrong. I hope we're not too late. We must destroy the ads and—something else."

HE SITS huddled up in the cab as we drive out into the sticks. At last the cab pulls up in front of a rickety old frame house and we climb out. It is almost dark, and Scrilch runs up the steps so fast he nearly trips in the dim light.

I follow him in.

"No time to lose," he says. "Help me bundle this stuff up. I must get it down into the furnace while I'm still able to. At this rate of growth I may not even get into the cellar."

I see he is a little off the beam, but I do not comment. I merely look at the living-room which is just filled with old paper. It looks like a government drive.

There is nothing but piles of clipped out coupons. Thousands of them. And Scrilch begins to stuff them into boxes. So I help.

All the time he looks at the door.

"Smell anything?" he asks me. I shake my head. We pile some more. "Hear anything downstairs?" he asks. I shake my head.

I notice he is shaking again.

"What's the matter?" I ask. "What am I supposed to smell and hear?"

"It's the last ad I answer," he breathes, hoarsely. "I'll tell you about that later. We'll have to figure out a way to destroy it. Dynamite, or something. It's growing every hour. I'm almost afraid to go down there. I want to get this stuff in the furnace before it blocks the way."

"What?" I come back, while we bundle up the stuff and carry it out to the cellar door.

Then I hear a rippling noise. Scrilch wheels around. His eyes bulge.

"You don't smell anything, or hear anything," he yells. "But you must see something? Or am I nuts?"

I think I am. Because I *do* see something now.

It is the kitchen floor. It *bulges*.

Yes, the boards in the floor are bulging up. And the ripping noise comes from the wood.

"Growing!" Scrilch screams.

Then he grabs up a pile of coupons.

"I'll get these in the furnace anyway," he shrieks. "No matter how big it is! I'll do it—I'll show you no ad can frighten me!"

He opens the cellar door. It is black down there, but he does not turn on a light. Instead he grabs his pile and runs down the steps.

I hear him yelling in the dark.

"Don't follow me!" he shouts. "It might be dangerous."

Then I just hear some thumping. All at once he yells again.

"Oh—no—it can't be—growing—no—get away—oh—"

And I hear something else. An awful noise. A *rubbery* noise, like somebody was bouncing a zeppelin up and down like a ball. Then there is an awful grunt, and I do smell some-

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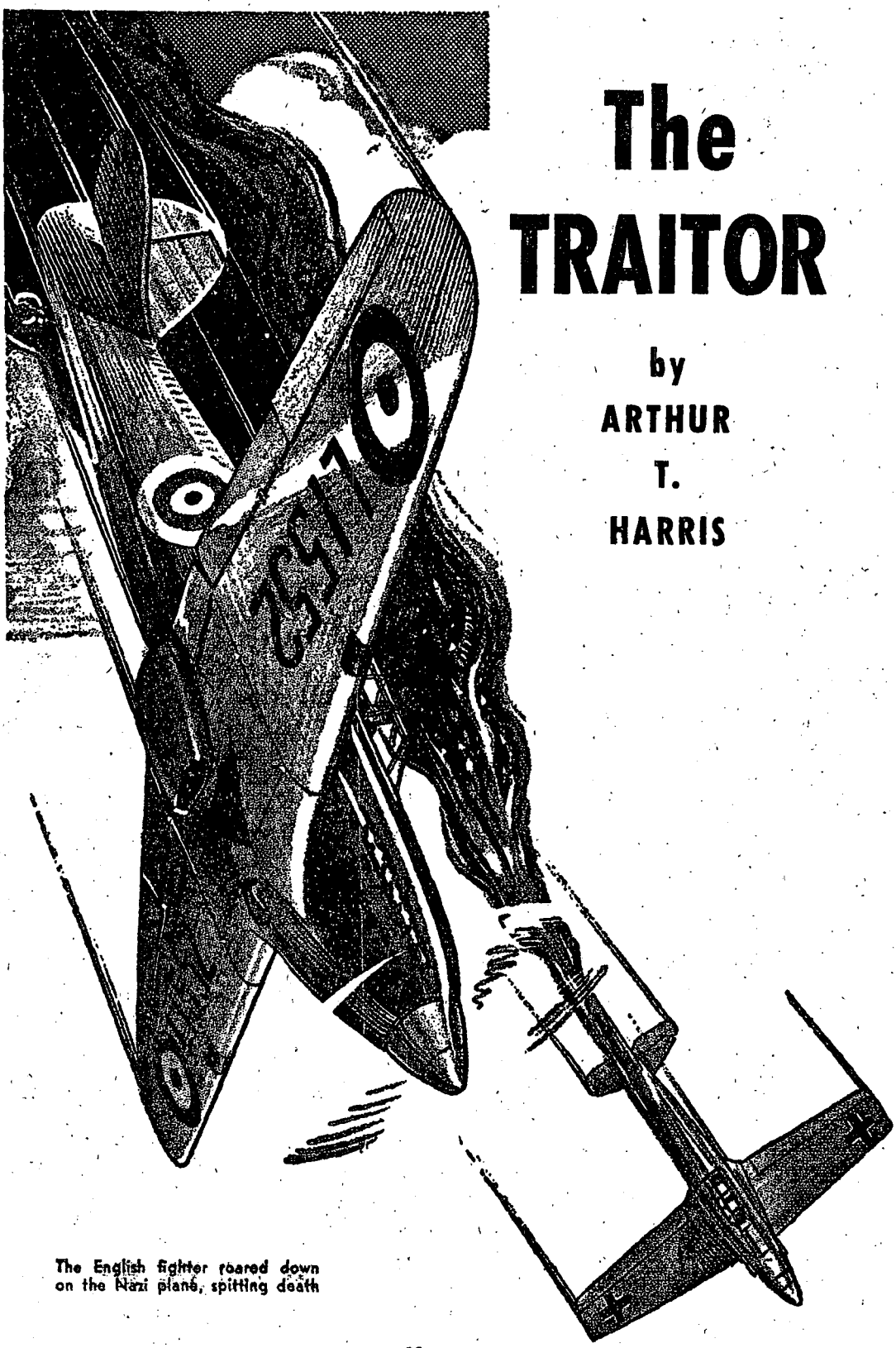
The TRAITOR

by ARTHUR T. HARRIS



The English fighter roared down on the Nazi plane, spitting death

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There they sat, this council of victory. Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek, Timoshenko, Eden, de Gaulle, Nehru, MacArthur—and Nazi generals crossed time to see . . .

AND so, at last, I was in England. I had been shot down on an observation flight from Northern France. I don't remember much that happened, because suddenly a squadron of Hurricanes flashed out from behind the clouds and set my plane on fire.

My observer was burned alive. I escaped with flames eating at my legs. A moment after I pulled the ripcord, I was unconscious. I remember nothing until my brain came awake ten days later, at a prison camp hospital near London.

When I was able to get about on crutches, they packed me off on a steamer to Canada. It was convoyed by destroyers, but we had several bad moments, I can tell you, when U-boats were spotted in the vicinity.

I did not stand the trip too well. When we disembarked they put me in an ambulance, and a day later I found myself in another hospital.

At this second prison camp, many *Luftwaffe* men were detained. They were for the most part a sullen lot. The Canadian authorities had a difficult time. If a bad riot had broken out, the Nazis would have used this as an excuse to maltreat British captives.

Naturally I heard only rumors, passed on through the lips of other German prisoners in the hospital wards. But it was an unpleasant atmosphere, and it became worse when at last I was convalescent.

Captive flyers gathered round me. In bitter, hysterical words they told me how Germany was winning the war, how they would stay on in Canada after the "victory" and "get even" with the prison officials.

I, who had seen action all over Europe, was sickened by such nonsense. For me, there was only one way out. I determined to escape.

It was not too difficult to escape, I must admit. I stayed in a special convalescent barracks, on the edge of the forest which surrounded the camp. There was electrified barbed wire, of course, and heavy iron bars.

I still limped somewhat, although I had resolutely discarded my crutches. I was not watched too closely. Surely it was not too hard to engage the food truck driver in conversation, that cool September day.

THEY had put me on part-time duty in the kitchen; I had demanded something to do. I followed the truck driver to the loading platform, ostensibly to beg a cigarette.

As he lit it for me, I smashed him on the jaw, and he collapsed into my arms. There was no one around at the moment; I had made certain of that.

I bundled him into the back of the truck, put on his leather jacket and cap, and even exchanged jokes with the camp sentries as I drove out the main gate.

I left the truck on a lonely road, made my way after three days to the St. Lawrence River, stole a rowboat in the dead of night and reached the

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American shore just as dawn was breaking.

My only fear was for my precise English diction. I had been well tutored as a child. But I was on guard every moment, and with the money stolen from the truck driver, I casually bought a railroad ticket to New York City and was never in danger for a moment.

It was now the first week in October. German diplomatic officials were overjoyed to see me. The hue and cry raised by the press at my disappearance soon died down. After all, Japan had not yet struck and America was not in the war.

It was all too easy. It had to end suddenly. And, of course, it did.

They kept me in New York for a week to rest up, while they arranged for me to go to Brazil and take an Italian plane to North Africa across the South Atlantic. I shaved my mustache, had my hair cut differently, bought a very average overcoat and a suit of clothes, and took in some shows on Broadway.

The night before I was to leave, I decided to walk back to the house of my German friends when the musical comedy I had seen let out shortly after eleven.

I do not recall the exact streets I took, but they led me to the big Central Park, when I should have avoided the dark paths and stuck to the main streets.

But does a *Luftwaffe* pilot avoid shadows? I turned up my collar and walked through the park. I stopped to light a cigarette, and the flame must have showed that I was reasonably well dressed.

At any rate, there was a sudden rush from behind some bushes and two men sprang at me. One of them swung a heavy instrument at my head—I believe the Americans call it a blackjack.

When I regained consciousness, a dapper little gentleman in a black homburg and white scarf was bending over me.

"You have been held up, yes?" he said.

His accent was definitely German.

"Jawohl," I told him painfully.

I tried to get up and he did his best to help me. I got to my feet, and my stomach became violently nauseous.

When it was over, my body was drenched with sweat and I was too weak to stand unaided. A thin trickle of blood came down my forehead, and one eye where I had been punched was swelling badly.

"You will come with me," said the little gentleman. "I am a physician. I live only a few blocks distant. It is fortunate for you that I was out for a walk."

SO HE took me to his home. He was a refugee, no doubt, that I knew at once. But naturally he must not know who I was. Nor would he have found out, had he not heard it from my own lips.

He dressed my wound and brewed me some hot tea. My wallet had been stolen, and I could not pay him, but he was more concerned with the beating I had taken.

I could not leave until I had slept, he decided. He put me to bed and I must have gone to sleep the moment I relaxed. I don't remember that I woke up during the night, but I must have had a slight fever.

When I awakened, I was perspiring and the bedclothes were disarranged. This I saw at a glance, but a moment later my eyes widened with surprise and fear.

The little doctor stood at the foot of the bed, a revolver in his hand. The

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look in his eyes was not pleasant.

"The fever is broken," he said curtly. "Meanwhile you have talked too much in your sleep. Of course, you may have had an hallucination. But I do not believe so. You are an escaped German flyer!"

I saw that he was not going to shoot, and my breath came more easily.

"That is correct," I told him. "Now call your American police and have me taken away. I will only be turned over to German diplomatic officials, or perhaps sent back to Canada. But go ahead, *Herr Doktor*. I bear you no ill will."

The muzzle of his revolver lowered perceptibly. He stared at me, as though he could not believe his ears.

"It is a trick!" he exclaimed. "No bluster, no threats, no demands. You merely accept the fate in store for you. It does not make sense!"

I pulled back the covers, reached for my belongings and began to put them on.

"Call the police," I said. "What difference does it make, anyway? I am a German, a Nazi. I am doomed. We are all doomed. Whether I am re-interned in Canada, or whether I live to fight again in Germany—frankly, my friend, it is of little importance. The result will be the same."

He stared at me, trying to make up his mind, and suddenly I was the spark of an idea growing in his eyes. The spark became a flame. He became almost transfixed.

"Jah!" the little doctor exclaimed. "You are right. You are but a minor player in the greatest tragedy of modern times. *Ach,* so! I cannot alter destiny, but I can write for you a new part, so that you can contribute something of value to this terrible drama. But you may not like the performance!"

I laced up my shoes and went into the bathroom to wash. The doctor stood by the door, that strange light kindled in his eyes. He had put the revolver away, I noticed.

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked him, finding a comb and parting my thinning blond hair. "As the Americans say, you wish to make a deal."

"That is it precisely," he said. "You agree?"

I examined my bruised eye. The swelling was still there, but the pain was almost gone.

"Prepare breakfast," I told him. "Then we shall talk."

BUT Dr. Otto Schmidt, my benefactor, was moody throughout the meal. I respected his wishes and maintained my own silence. When we were finished he rose slowly, and gave me a long searching look. Then he led the way through a kitchen door to the basement.

I have seen workshops in the homes of my German friends, but never one so complete as that of Dr. Schmidt. The entire room was lined with shelves of electrical equipment — condensers, rheostats, tubes, wires and other electrical whatnot.

But what interested me most was the special lathes and the compact but efficient electric furnace.

"I make aluminum forgings," Dr. Schmidt explained briefly, "and machine my own parts. I must do all my own work. No foundry, no research laboratory in the world could put my blueprints into a practical working model."

"A working model?" I said, puzzled.

"But of course!" the physician exclaimed. "The time machine."

In a corner of the basement, a space was set aside for what appeared to be

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a storage closet. The heavy wooden door was barred and bolted. Dr. Schmidt pushed the bars back and found a key ring. The sight which greeted my eyes made the blood pound excitedly in my veins.

In the little cubicle was the most amazing thing I have ever seen. I can describe it only as a square leather seat, entirely encompassed in a maze of aluminum struts, radiolike tubes and a devilishly ingenious instrument board which faced the seat.

"Sit down," Dr. Schmidt ordered. "You have said that you know Germany is doomed. I shall now demonstrate to you the truth of your words."

I seated myself, sweat breaking out on my back.

"Time machine," I repeated apprehensively. "Do you mean — travel through time?"

"Exactly," the physician said.

He then leaned forward and adjusted the dials. He pointed to a little switch in the center.

"When you start," he directed, "push this switch to the right. When you wish to come back, push to the left. When you wish to emerge into any year in the future, center the switch.

"Read the dials carefully. They indicate the year and the day of the month, also the time of day. I suggest that before you start, you set the dials to the time in the future at which you desire to be present."

I loosened my tie and mopped my forehead.

"But what country shall I be in?" I stammered.

Dr. Schmidt extended his hand again and made adjustments on what looked like a gyroscopic compass.

"You will go to Moscow," he said. "For that matter, it makes little difference. The world will be all the same—after the war."

I settled myself in the chair and nodded.

"Push the switch!" Dr. Schmidt ordered.

I did so.

THE result was startling in the extreme. There was a brisk, impatient sound, as of the wind whistling through a forest. I was thrown forward by forces which seemed to drain the blood from my head. I fought for consciousness, bending my neck and breathing deeply.

When my brain cleared, I appeared to be racing at an incredible speed through the atmosphere. Great clouds filled the sky, and far below there seemed to be waves. Then I was over a great continent, and a great plain, which extended far as the eye could see.

There was a sudden jolt. The time machine appeared to be descending, but at so extraordinary a rate that velocity had no meaning. An abrupt jar sent a spasm of fear through my body.

And—there I was. I was in the secluded corner of a great courtyard. Somewhat shakily I emerged from the time machine. The switch, I noted, had swung back automatically to neutral.

A hot sun shone down on the courtyard. As I moved toward the center, I could glimpse all about me the high cupolas of cathedrals, centuries old. The courtyard itself seemed distinguished by this ornate Russian architecture.

"Mein Gott!" I muttered, remembering picture books I had seen. "Then this is the Kremlin, and I am actually in Moscow."

The Kremlin is an incredible arrangement of government buildings and interlocking corridors. I found the nearest door and entered, trying to

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look as inconspicuous as possible.

A stocky, calm-looking military officer, in a simple tunic with diamond insignia on the tabs stepped from an apartment and glanced at me.

"Marshal Timoshenko!" I gasped.

The great Soviet military leader nodded good-humoredly and appeared to take my presence for granted. The marshal offered me an excellent Turkish cigarette, and we walked along together until we approached the great doors of a conference room.

The marshal smiled at the helmeted soldiers on guard, who snapped to salute and threw open the portals. I bowed to the Soviet leader and gestured for him to be first. My every thought was to whirl about and race back for the haven of Dr. Schmidt's time machine!

But I swallowed my fear and, heart beating with excitement, followed the marshal inside. He advanced toward what was obviously his seat at the great horseshoe table, while I stole to the rear of the brilliant assembly hall and found myself a seat at the press table.

I had never seen such a gathering of international notables in my life. Joseph Stalin sat at the head of the table, flanked on the right by a lean, bright-eyed Chinese warlord, who must of course be Marshal Chiang Kai-shek. On the left sat a fine-looking Hindu—Jawaharlal Nehru, the great Indian leader.

I glanced up and down the conference table. There was Eden, of Great Britain; General de Gaulle, of France; a distinguished American general with Air Force insignia.

STALIN rose quietly, looking at his international colleagues with calm satisfaction. The room hushed, until I could hear my own breathing. Correspondents at the press table cocked their ears, pencils raised to take down every word.

"Gentlemen," Joseph Stalin began, "we have assembled here today to work out an international plan for the Chinese and Indian nations. We wish to give them the benefit of our experience, to aid them in the establishment of sound political and economic systems.

"Since the crushing defeat of Germany, Japan and Italy . . ."

I started, and glanced excitedly over the conference table. There was patently no German or Japanese delegate, since every place was marked by a small national flag. I thought I saw an Italian flag, without the crest of the House of Savoy, but I could not be certain.

I know only that I was sweating. Frightened, bewildered, I got up unobtrusively from the press table, found a nearby exit and was soon walking back along the corridor by which I had come.

The time machine was still in the corner of the courtyard, undiscovered and intact. I climbed into the seat, shaking and, not bothering to settle back, shoved the switch to the left.

The same confusing sensation gripped me again, as once more Dr. Schmidt's incredible brainchild responded instantly. Back across Russia and Europe I sped, high in the sun-gilded heavens. The Atlantic was but a fragmentary illusion.

There was a familiar jolt, and the machine came to rest.

"Back so soon!" exclaimed Dr. Otto Schmidt. "Do not tell me you were convinced so easily!"

I WENT back to Germany as winter settled harshly over the continent.

They met me in Berlin with brass

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bands and a parade. That night there was a reception in the Air Ministry, but the occasion was spoiled when British bombers paid a visit and we had to scuttle to air raid shelters.

A *Luftwaffe* general pinned a special gold Iron Cross on my tunic and whispered that I might have anything I desired. He said it with a leer, and I recalled the reputation he had got for himself during earlier, careless days in Munich.

"Nein dankeschön, Herr General," I said. "That can wait. What I desire is of a different nature. In America, I met a naturalized comrade who still held to his good German ideals."

I did not state whose Germany.

"He was a worker in a great aircraft plant in the state of Connecticut," I lied carefully. "Secretly he smuggled out some plans and turned them over to me. They are regrettably incomplete, *Herr General,* but with my own laboratory I believe I can construct a machine such as Germany has never seen."

The *Luftwaffe* official clapped me heartily on the back and issued the necessary orders. In a week's time I was established in my own Berlin workshop, with all the material I required.

"You can have no assistants," Dr. Schmidt had said sternly. "You can trust no one."

And so I labored all during the day and half the night. The weeks went by, and as my time machine began to take form, our German invasion of the Soviet Union became hopelessly, suicidally bogged down.

At last I was ready.

"Take Moscow!" Hitler had screamed.

But Moscow still stood.

I took an airplane to the Eastern Front and landed at Smolensk. With my special *Luftwaffe* pass, countersigned by the High Command itself, I commandeered a staff car and drove up to the battle.

The cold was indescribable. To go outside for even a few minutes was a miserable experience. All the way up to the front, ambulances lumbered back with frozen, gangrenous men about to lose arms, legs, ears, noses. I arrived at our headquarters in a former schoolhouse and was admitted at once to the field commander.

The *Wehrmacht* marshal faced me with bloodshot eyes and a gray twitching face.

"You have failed," I told him softly.

"We have failed indeed." He shuddered, slumping into a chair and burying his face in his hands.

"Come back with me," I said, my heart racing wildly. "It is too late now for you to launch a new offensive. Ask for a short leave of absence. You are exhausted; you must have rest."

The marshal raised his haggard face.

"Who are you?" he demanded suspiciously. "What is your purpose here?"

"You would not question a hero of the Reich, *Herr Feldmarschall?"* I countered stoutly. "I have come here on a special mission, as my pass indicates. I have a marvelous new machine to show you. It will settle—everything. I would show it to you first."

MY JUNKERS transport landed us safely in Berlin. The airport was swept by an icy blizzard, and we huddled in our greatcoats as we stepped from the plane and entered the Air Ministry limousine.

I escorted my high-ranking guest to my laboratory. I helped him off with his coat and set out brandy and soda. He drank perhaps a bit more than he should have, but color had come back

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to his face when I ushered him into my workroom and closed the door.

"Herr Feldmarschall," I began. "In America I came across the plans for a most astounding machine. I will now ask you to witness a personal demonstration."

When he saw the time machine, he could not believe his eyes. Himself an expert in mechanized warfare, he examined every inch of the apparatus, shaking his head over the maze of aluminum tubes and controls.

"Be seated, *Herr Feldmarschall,"* I bade him. "I am going to send you on a short trip into the future. I want you to see with your own eyes what lies in store for the Fatherland."

Involuntarily he obeyed me; and then, realizing what I had said, made to get up. I pushed him gently back in the seat.

"Time is short," I said. "Explanations will come later—if you wish. This is no trick. The time for tricks is long since past. Now we must face the truth."

I showed him how to use the main controls. Then I adjusted the dials so that the journey would take him eighteen months into the future. And I set the place as a partly ruined villa at Sedan, France.

"You may start now, *Herr Feldmarschall,"* I said.

There was a blinding flash of light. I closed my eyes and had to rub them for a minute or so. When I opened them, the time machine had disappeared on its rendezvous with destiny.

I found a chair and sat down, trembling. I knew that I dared not move anything there. I sat with the sweat running down my collar, and wondered what the marshal would do when he returned.

It was a full three-quarters hour before I heard a weird and wholly unnatural vibration in the air. The whole cubicle began to glow with a strange, phosphorescent aura.

There was again the whistling of wind through a naked forest. Then the time machine came back, to settle with a flash of light on its stand.

THE German field commander remained in the seat, rooted to the spot, his eyes wide and staring. Slowly he gathered himself together, shuddered, and climbed jerkily from the machine.

He took the brandy I offered and tilted the bottle to his bloodless lips. He drank a long, hard swallow and turned back to the time machine with an incredulous look.

"Mein Gott!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"The terms were harsh, then," I said, a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"Terrible!" he cried. "Terrible! And a Polish general handed them to me. They demanded to know whom I represented. I said I represented the Great German General Staff, which had seized Nazi party officials and taken over control of the Reich."

The marshal sank into the chair I had used. Cold sweat beaded his forehead and ran down his ashen cheeks.

"I said the General Staff was fully capable of maintaining order in the Reich. The Polish general—*ach,* he had been purposely chosen to humiliate me, as the representative of the nation to which we had extended the most brutal treatment.

"This arrogant fool, this clumsy upstart insisted on full and unconditional surrender! He said all Germany would be occupied with picked troops of the United Nations. I think he used the word—quarantined! I was forced to agree to every stipulation."

(Continued on page 108)

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LAND-GOING FISH

By JACK WEST

Here is the fantastic story of a fish. You'll find it hard to believe, but it's absolutely true. Do other worlds have more amazing creatures?

IF someone was to tell you that you could go fishing in the middle of an African dried mud flat and catch a neat string of fish, you'd probably believe you were talking to an idiot. Yet this is the exact truth. There are fish in such dry mud flats; and they can be caught. What's more they can be caught alive and transported across the Atlantic Ocean to this county without using a drop of water to keep them alive. Then, once on this side of the Atlantic they can be placed in water and "brought to life."

The fish is the East African lungfish. Strangest of all fish he lives a life of constant dry and wet spells, going from muddy pools during the rainy season to the blistering dry heat of the drought season so well known in East Africa. When the dry season begins, this fish burrows into the mud at the bottom of a pool. As the water disappears the fish digs deeper and deeper into the mud. Then, by moving around, it shapes a cell just large enough to contain its body. As the mud dries into a cement-hard crust the cell keeps its shape, forming a cocoon of sorts.

The lungfish breathes through a small hole from its cell to the surface. Ichthyologists don't know how this hole is made, but the fish gets enough air to live in its cell for years. Intense heat bakes the mud brick-hard and the fish may actually be quarried out in a block. Scientists have been able to transport these blocks containing live lungfish from Africa to Chicago. The greatest danger in shipping the lungfish en block is in damage to his brick-like home. Should it be smashed open the lungfish would die in a few minutes unless placed in water.

Lungfishes have been kept alive in dry storage for more than five years and then revived by being placed in water. The water softens the mud and reaches the fish which, curiously enough, begins to drown. The choking off of vital air makes the fish struggle to the surface so he can breathe. You see, the lungfish has a kind of half-way lung similar to the turtle's. He can get along under the water, but must come to the surface once in a while to breathe.

A strange fish that often amazes the African people in French Sudan is a catfish that every now and then during the rainy season wiggles and flops about on land in search of food. This fish, technically called a "harmouth" of the genus *Clarias*, leaves his pond at night to catch insects and break down stalks of grain to eat the seed. When dry weather comes the harmouth literally

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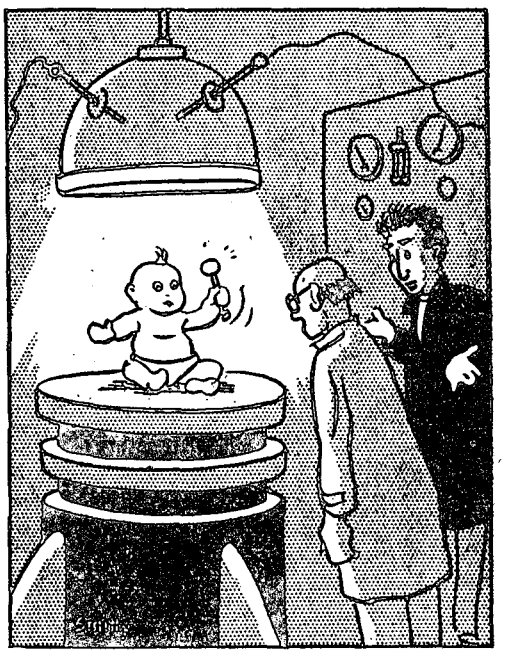
digs in like the lungfish. He burrows deeply into the mud to escape the intense heat of the African sun.

Canon H. B. Tristram, a noted ichthyologist who has specialized in the study of African fishes, tells of seeing a procession of harmouths following the course of a small brook that formed the outlet of a spring pool. In spite of the fact that there was hardly enough water to moisten the sand, the large catfishes (all of three feet long) followed the course of the hidden stream. Tristram took several of the catfish to his camp and found them good eating. A few of them he kept out of water for three days. When returned to water they swam briskly away.

Before the turn of the century a goateed French naval surgeon by the name of Dr. Suard made a study of the *Clarias* catfish in and around Nioro in French West Africa. He found he could keep the *Clarias* alive in a tin biscuit box by feeding them small amounts of millet. Dr. Suard found he had to be careful in opening and closing the box because the catfish had the bad habit of hopping out and going into the fields at night. Dr. Suard carried his fishes alive in their tin box from Nioro to the port of embarkation about 500 miles distant. Through some mistake the fish were stored aboard the ship too close to the boiler room. The heat killed them all.

The Americans too can boast of land-going fish. A beautiful little fish known as the "Argentine pearl fish" *(Cynolebias bellottii)* is found in the *Gran Chaco* of Paraguay and in parts of northern Argentina where there are marshlands. When the dry season begins these fishes lay their eggs in the mud at the bottom of the pools. Parching dry winds quickly evaporate all the water, leaving the fishes to die. Karl Thomas, writing in the *Aquarium* magazine a few years ago, tells how he took home a bit of dried mud from one of these ponds and placed it in water. After a week, about a hundred young fishes hatched from the once dried eggs. The little *Cynolebias* all died because Thomas could not find the proper food for them. Later his experiment turned out successfully.

Surprising enough right here in North America we have some land-going fish. In fact these fish are often found in the Middle Western states. Alfred C. Weed, Curator of Fishes at the Field Museum in Chicago, tells of a species of fishes that can live buried in dried mud at the bottom of a pond. Weed tells how he filled a lily pool with mud from the bottom of a pond that had once held water a few weeks earlier. Weed found a mosquito fish, *Gambusia,* in the pool the next day. Acting on a hunch he put a few fistfulls of mud and some water in a bucket. Within less than an hour three *Gambusia* were



"Professor Jenkins' time machine broke while he was in it and now he has to wait till he grows up to fix it."

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swimming feverishly around in the bucket. Later when the pond dried up the *Gambusia* burrowed into the mud to wait the summer rains.

Middle Western farmers in the late spring have occasionally plowed up what they call "young dogfish." Curator Weed calls these a form of mud minnow, *Umbra,* a fish more closely related to the pike than to the dogfish.

The mud minnow and *Gambusia* are essentially like ordinary fishes in the structure of their breathing equipment, according to Curator Weed. They cannot live through long periods of drought unless they bury themselves in soil that will remain moist through the dry season. *Clarias,* the grain-eating fish, can remain away from water for long periods because of a camel like arrangement it has to carry its own breathing water. On each side of its body is a pouch which carries water to moisten an extra breathing organ. Both African lungfishes have their air bladders similar to a lung in an air-breathing creature, and when encased in mud or in cocoon form they breathe very slowly.

Strangely enough ichthyologists don't know too much about land-going fish. There are types of air breathing fish in the East Indies, Australia, North and South America, and Africa; yet those in the business feel they have just scratched the surface in studying these odd creatures. "Perhaps someday," says one scientist, "the household aquarium will consist of a bit of dried mud!"

THE TRAITOR

(Concluded from page 105)

I waited for the man's heaving shoulders to subside.

"What, then, can we do now?" I asked quietly.

He raised his bloodshot eyes.

"I will contact my Junkers associates at once!" he said. "I will tell them how futile is this war. I will bring them here to this—this time machine, so that they can make the journey and see for themselves."

"And then?" I prodded.

"We must stop this excess of cruelty!" exclaimed the field marshal. He was shouting now. "We have gone too far already. If we do not call a halt, we will be so crushed that we can never rise again."

"Never rise again?" I said softly.

"But of course!" declared the Prussian warlord. "If the victors leave us at least something—steel mills, iron and coal deposits—we can rearm. In another g e n e r a t i o n — we try once more!"

I AM flying now to meet my Maker. I am again on active flight duty, and my Messerschmitt is out on patrol over the English Channel. It is a cold winter day, but there are not quite enough clouds to protect me.

Before I turned over my laboratory to the field marshal and returned to the *Luftwaffe,* I made a second trip through time. I went beyond the armistice capitulation at Sedan. I saw that the United Nations anticipated what the Prussian Junkers had in the back of their minds.

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And the Junkers were — liquidated. . . .

Ah—over there! A lone Spitfire, rising swiftly to intercept me. The youngster in that plane must wonder what a single Nazi is doing over his sacred Channel.

He does not know what I know. He does not know why Hitler's High Command on the Russian front resigned in a body. He does not know of the seeds of suspicion which I sowed throughout the Fatherland. He has read that the *Fuehrer's* military geniuses have been seized with a strange inertia—but he does not know why.

He knows only that in a matter of seconds now he will come up head-on against a hated Nazi. He will gasp with surprise when I do not lace him with my Madsden machine guns. He will stare with unbelieving eyes at a *Luftwaffe* pilot who makes no effort to protect himself or to fight back.

I hope his machine guns fire straight and true. I hope his cupronickel bullets strike the cockpit hatch and render me dead. I have done my work as my conscience dictates. But in the eyes of my countrymen, I am a German and a traitor, and I must pay the price.

Ah! He has the range now. I can see bullets chewing across the wing and reaching for my body . . .

THE RETURN OF THE HUN

(Concluded from page 85)

from the earth, and with them, the other peoples of a crazed continent. That is the past.

"But you are the future; you could have affected the past. You could have changed what is written. With the new weapon, your nation could have swept the earth, destroyed its enemies. History would be changed, and it would follow an entirely different series of alternatives.

"In that new series our land and our people would not, could not exist, Herr Kapitan. It is theoretically possible that they may continue to exist in a shadow-series of alternatives, an existence apart from reality. That is theory; we shall not take the chance. If you are allowed to affect the past you automatically change the future—and *we* are the future.

"We free peoples have always been the future, and your kind can never prevail against us.

"Do you deny the charge?"

The giant's implacable eyes swept the red-robed justices, and in them was a flicker of sardonic amusement. He was smiling.

"No," he said. "I do not deny it. I never realized until now what a truly great joke has been played!"

A gavel hit the bench sharply, a voice spoke:

"At high noon tomorrow the machine that brought Gerhard von Kuhlmann and Walter Jung across Time will be destroyed. At the same hour, a member of this Tribunal, to be chosen by lot, will escort Gerhard von Kuhlmann to the Chamber of Penitence, where he will be painlessly put to death. It is done."

The massive yellow head snapped proudly back, the right arm clicked to stiff salute.

"Sieg Heil!" he barked. Then he placed himself between two guards, towering above them, and marched firmly out of the hall. But as he passed I saw that he was frowning, and I heard his puzzled words . . .

"But how could the Fuehrer have been wrong?"

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VITALITY

THE life energy of many rabbits flowed into Slip Martin's body; soon he would be a superman. Then the supply of rabbits became exhausted. However, there was Abbott's dog . . .

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FOR MURDER

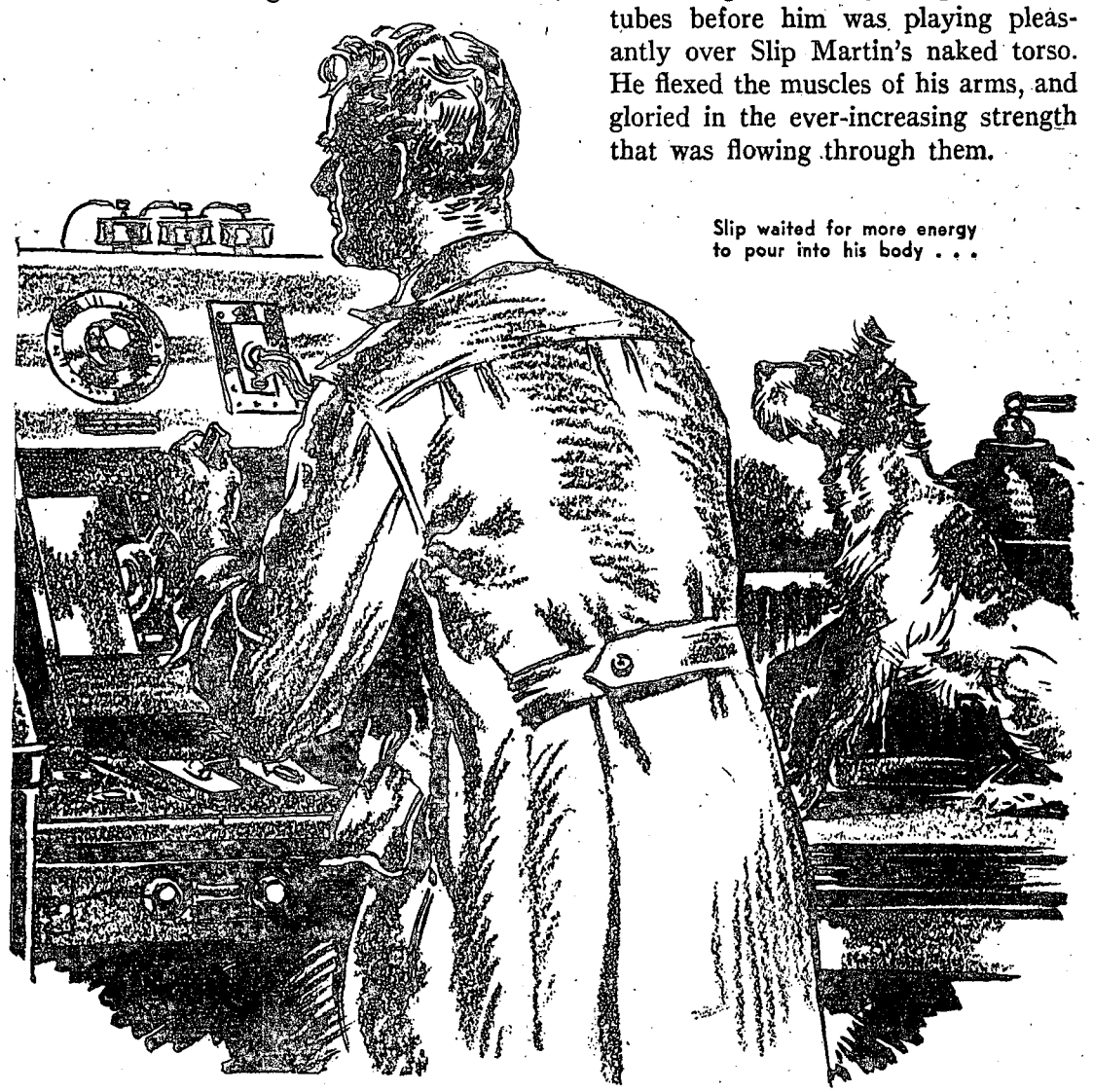
by RICHARD O. LEWIS

I . . . I think you've had enough," said Dr. Abbott. "I don't want to build you into a superman or . . . or some kind of freak." He started toward the control board to shut off the machine.

Slip Martin grinned out of the corner of his big mouth. He knew then that he was going to kill Dr. Abbott. Nothing could be simpler. The little, gray haired doctor's only companion in the lonely old house was Tiff, a small terrier. No one would ever know. . . .

But he would wait yet awhile, wait until he knew more about the machine.

The light from glowing bank of tubes before him was playing pleasantly over Slip Martin's naked torso. He flexed the muscles of his arms, and gloried in the ever-increasing strength that was flowing through them.



Slip waited for more energy to pour into his body . . .

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On his glistening torso were knife scars. Scores of them. Six weeks ago, Dr. Abbott had found him, cut and bleeding, in a ditch along side the rutty lane that led to the old house. Dr. Abbott had dragged him into the house and into the laboratory, had patched up his wounds and had placed him before the bank of glowing tubes.

And miraculous new life had begun to flow through him immediately, healing him, building up his body and filling him with a vitality beyond his wildest dreams.

"Yes," he had told the little doctor, "I was attacked by a gang of cutthroats, a gang of thieves who butchered me up and left me to die."

He hadn't told Dr. Abbott that the men who had mutilated him were members of his own gang, and that they were merely exacting gang-justice because he had tried to sell them out!

And he hadn't told Dr. Abbott about those posters that were even now appearing in post-offices and other public buildings throughout the state. A memory of those posters flashed through Slip's brain: Wanted for murder. Slip Martin; alias Stoolie Simms; alias Hatchet Martin; complexion dark; height five feet, five inches; weight 130 pounds; build slim; pointed face; small, beady eyes. Dangerous.

But that description wouldn't fit Slip Martin now. No! Far from it! The bank of tubes had been adding height and weight to him at every "treatment." He was now nearly six feet tall, and had gained nearly seventy pounds in weight!

A few more of the "treatments" and the police would never know him! Neither would the members of the gang who had tried to kill him!

And Slip Martin meant to get more of those "treatments"! Now! Before he killed Dr. Abbott!

His hand shot out from the light of the tubes to clutch the doctor's arm. "Hold on a minute," he commanded. "One more rabbit won't hurt anything."

He didn't know the science of the tubes. All Slip Martin knew was that you placed a rabbit or some other small animal in the cage on the other side of the tubes. Then the tubes began quickly to suck the vitality—the very thing called *Life* — from that animal and to transfer that energy into his own body.

YOU couldn't *see* what was happening on the other side of the tubes; but you could tell what was going on. You could *feel* it! You could feel the energy flowing into your own body, making it *quivery and alive and strong!*

"But there is no need for further experimentation," said Dr. Abbott. "The machine is perfected. Your own physical gain has proven that beyond a shade of doubt." In spite of the strange actions of the man before him, Dr. Abbott's blue eyes were glowing with the triumph of success that was his, his after five years of work. . . .

Slip Martin's lips went into a sudden straight line. His eyes narrowed, and his fingers bit deeper into the doctor's arm. "Now, listen here, Abbott," he said coldly. "You get another rabbit from the cages and put him on the hot seat behind the tubes. I'm taking another treatment! And this time I'm running the machine myself!"

"But you can't!" Alarm was beginning to show in the doctor's eyes. "The tubes might get too hot. One of them might burn out. And it would take at least two weeks to construct another. . . ."

Slip stepped down from the small platform before the tubes and took the

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doctor firmly by both shoulders. "Now, look here," he said, his eyes glaring. "All you got to do is to play along with me for a few more experiments. Then we'll take this machine out of here, and I'll cut you in on the fortune."

He was lying, of course. It wasn't Slip Martin's nature to cut anyone in on anything.

The little doctor tried to tear himself loose from the strong fingers that held him. "But you don't understand!" he said. "There will be no fortune. Duplicates of this machine will soon be in every hospital in the world. . . ."

"I know a few rich guys that would give a million bucks cash on the line to have their vitality of youth restored for a month or two," Slip cut in.

" . . . and . . . mankind would benefit. . . ."

"That's what *you* think!" Slip was getting tired of the dramatics. "But I've got other ideas. Big ideas! From now on I'm taking over here and you'll do as I say!" His fingers dug deeper into the man's shoulders for emphasis.

An ominous growl came from a corner of the room. The loud voices had awakened Tiff, the doctor's terrier; and Tiff didn't like what he saw. He didn't like to see the big man shaking his master that way. He didn't even like the smell of the big man—not since that brutal kick two weeks ago. . . .

Tiff got slowly to his feet. He was little more than a foot high; but what he lacked in size, he made up for in terrier-courage. The short hair at the nape of his neck bristled, his lips curled back from his sharp teeth and he let out another growl of warning.

Slip didn't hear the growl. He was too busy enjoying the strength of his big hands. He was now the type of man he had often dreamed of being. Big! Domineering! Brutal! So much different from the fearful, worm-like piece of humanity he had been six weeks before!

He got pleasure in seeing the smaller man writhe and struggle in his grip. "Now, get going!" he said, finally, and gave the doctor a shove in the direction of the cages that lined one wall.

Almost instantly, a ball of fury streaked out from a corner at him. It was a bristling, snarling streak of hate and anger. It was Tiff.

A sudden oath of pain shot from Slip Martin's lips as he felt the sharp teeth sink into the back of his leg.

He wheeled about. The dog was tearing and snapping viciously at him, pulling at the leg of his trousers. "Why, you dirty little cur. . . ." Slip's foot lashed out. The third kick caught the small dog in the midriff and sent him rolling and yipping across the floor.

The light in the tubes winked out. Dr. Abbott had reached the control board and had turned the switch.

SLIP turned in that direction just in time to see the doctor clutching for some of the intricate wiring among the controls. A leap carried him to the man's side. His fist lashed out and sent the doctor reeling away before any damage could be done. "Try any more of that," he ground out, "and . . . and I'll kill you!"

Tiff was back again, snarling and snapping. Another kick sent him sliding across the floor. He didn't get up this time. He lay there panting and whimpering with pain, his eyes glaring madness.

"You're . . . you're insane!" It was Dr. Abbott. He was facing the big man, holding a hand to his bruised jaw where Slip had struck him.

Slip grabbed him by the arm. "Get

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another rabbit ready," he ordered. "And no more foolishness, or . . ." He drew his fist back menacingly.

He was a little man being faced by a brute, but the fist did not scare Dr. Abbott. "There are no more rabbits," he said evenly. "I used the last of them to make you the beast that you are."

A glance at the empty cages along the wall proved to Slip that the doctor was speaking the truth. Anger flared up within him, darkening his face. He wanted to learn more about the machine. He *had* to learn more about it, had to build himself up to the point where recognition by the police in the outside world would be impossible!

Then he would kill Abbott and take the machine. He would walk out into the world a free man with a fortune to be had for the taking. And the members of the gang that had tried to kill him . . . well, they wouldn't recognize him, and he would search them down one by one. . . .

"If you know what's good for you," he threatened, "you'll find more rabbits, and find them in a hurry."

Dr. Abbott shook his head slowly. "There are no more rabbits available," he said calmly. "In fact there are no other living animals about the place except . . ." He broke off quickly.

"Sure!" said Slip. His eyes lighted. "No other animals except . . . *except that cur dog of yours!* I should have thought of that! He'll do for an experiment!"

He turned around. Tiff was struggling painfully to get up from where he had fallen, his eyes red balls of hate, his body quivering with the torture of those brutal kicks.

And at that moment, Dr. Abbott made another frantic dash toward the controls. But he wasn't quick enough. Slip's big fist crashed into his face and sent him spinning backward to the far wall where he slumped to the floor.

Tiff was crawling forward, his teeth bared, game to the last. But even his inherent courage would not force his broken body to respond properly.

Slip caught him up quickly by the scruff of the neck and carried him to the opposite side of the tubes. He struck him once with his fist when Tiff tried to bite him, then shoved him into the cage.

A moment later, he had given the switch upon the control board a half turn and had leaped into the resultant glow of the tubes that spread across the platform.

The familiar warmth of the tubes thrilled him. Their purring vibration surged through him, setting up an answering tremor in every atom of his body. The rhythm of the tubes seemed to dominate his whole being.

He remembered what had happened six weeks ago on that platform. His body had been broken. He had been all but dead, bleeding from a score of wounds. But that machine had sent instant life coursing through him, had filled him with untold energy in a lightning-like flow of shattered atoms from the tubes.

And he knew what would be happening on the other side of those tubes. Tiff would be slowly deteriorating as the power of the tubes picked out the living atoms from him. Soon, the dog would disappear entirely. . . .

Disappear entirely!

A thought, fantastic in its evil, flashed through Slip's brain. *Disappear entirely!* Yes! That was it! After the dog had been used up, he would still have an available supply of energy to feed the tubes: *Dr. Abbott!*

That would solve the problem of disposing of the body! There would be no evidence left! He could use what-

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ever energy from the doctor's body he wanted! Then he could just let the body disappear. . . .

It was perfect! The perfect crime!

DR. ABBOTT had pulled himself up to a sitting position along the wall. A trickle of blood was trailing down from a corner of his mouth. But his eyes were defiant. Accusing. "I . . . I should have let you die!" There was something beyond mere anger in his voice.

Slip didn't answer. He sat there before the tubes, watching the doctor narrowly lest the man should try to make another dash to the controls.

This was easy. Too easy to be true. Soon the dog would be gone. Then would come Abbott. . . .

Slip didn't like the way the man looked at him. There was something in the man's eyes. What was it? It wasn't fear. No. It was more like . . . *more like a look of triumph!*

Had something gone wrong? He glanced quickly at the tubes. No, they were all right. They were still glowing and humming. He could still feel the vibration within his body.

Then he looked once more at Abbott.

The doctor was still upon the floor. But that look in his eyes. It seemed to have spread over the rest of his face! He seemed to be gloating! Gloating?

There came a small flash of light. Slip wheeled about. One of the tubes had winked out. Abbott had said something about being careful not to overtax the tubes. The humming vibration ceased abruptly.

A squeal of terror strangled in Slip Martin's throat as he caught sight of himself. Cold fear shot through his body, leaving him weak and bedraggled.

His hands! They seemed to have grown smaller! His arms! The huge muscles had vanished! His torso was sunken and hollow! He was no longer the strong, vital brute he had been but a moment ago! He was more like the ratty individual he had been six weeks. . . .

A scream escaped his lips. Dizziness and nausea swept over him as he leaped from the platform.

The room danced crazily. There was a red madness before his eyes as he saw the triumphant look that was etched deeply upon the doctor's face.

"You tricked me!" he screamed. "You and your machine!" He leaped forward, fighting against his own weakness. "But you won't gloat! I'll kill you! I'll kill you!"

His fingers found the helpless man's throat. Madness lent him strength. His fingers bit in like steel talons. "I won't let you gloat! I'll kill you first! Then I'll fix the machine!"

The doctor had ceased his struggling. His head was lolling awkwardly to one side. But Slip Martin kept on, carried away by the insane madness of his failure. "I'll kill you! I'll kill . . ."

His voice was drowned out by the sudden roar that filled the room. Something was behind him. A savage something with a hot breath. . . .

Slip Martin wheeled about. He felt that all sanity had left him as he caught sight of the brute that was charging down upon him, fangs gleaming, eyes blazing.

Tiff! The dog that should have been reduced to nothingness! But the dog was no longer a frail, broken thing! The dog had gained at least seventy pounds. . . .

Slip frantically threw his arms up to guard his face. Then the brute was upon him. Fangs tore into his arms. Claws raked his naked torso.

He tried to spin away. His own blood was making the floor slippery.

(Continued on page 235)

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Can We Foretell the Future?

by JULIUS SCHWARTZ

Just how close can we humans come to foretelling the future. Can mere logic forecast coming events?

THE amazing forecasts of Nostradamus, the celebrated French astrologer and physician of the 16th century, has awakened great interest in the field of prophecy. Science-fiction readers would simply prefer to believe that Nostradamus, availing himself of the use of a time machine, visited the future and returned to his era to record his "predictions" of things to come.

While most people are unimpressed with Nostradamus' ability of true prophecy they concede he may have been a good guesser. They point out that his mystic verses become "clear" only after the event has occurred; and then usually by a stretch of the imagination the Nostradamus disciple is able to link the historical event with the prophecy.

Nevertheless, the idea of prophecy has stirred the imagination of mankind ever since Noah foretold the coming of the great deluge. Are prophecies pure guesses or can they have some basis in scientific fact? What would happen if a convention of experts predicted the outcome of an event in their special field? If the chief of staffs of all the present belligerent powers got together and predicted the outcome of the war, could they come very close to the truth?

Predictions of future events by non-experts, on the other hand, are usually looked upon as blind guesses without any real importance. Nevertheless, *such an experiment has been conducted** and it is interesting to see what light it can throw on the behavior of individuals with respect to the future, and on the origin and make-up of notions of the future.

SIX hundred and seven freshmen and general psychology students, mostly sophomores, at the University of Maine, were subjects in the experiment conducted in September, 1930. Predictions were made about ten different future events. Each student was given a number of choices for each prediction, and instructed to underline the one most certain to him.

Question 1. The weather can be predicted ahead of time (a range of choices from 1 second to 24 hours was given).

According to most of the subjects, the weather can be predicted 24 hours ahead of time. This question suggests a measurement of opinion about the effectiveness of expert prediction, especially as to the upper limits of prediction.

Question 2. America will join the League of Nations (range from 1931 to 2000).

Question 5. The cure for cancer will be discovered in (range from 1931 to 2000).

An interesting similarity was found in the prediction of the two different events. All groups predicted that

*"Group Predictions of Future Events," by Nathan Israeli, in May, 1933, *Journal of Social Psychology*.—Ed.

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America will join the League by 1955 and that the cure for cancer will be discovered by 1949. The League entry date of the freshmen groups according to the general average was 1949.5, and of the sophomore groups 1945.4; the cancer discovery date of the freshmen, 1946.5, and of the sophomores, 1945.7.

A comparison of averages and deviations showed a similarity of estimates of the various groups for the date of entry into the League by our country; and there was a parallelism of the estimates for the year of the discovery of the cure for cancer. (Of course, the students were forced to assume that the United States would join the League. No account was taken of the possibility that the League would collapse, or that the U. S. would never join it.)

Question 3. Babe Ruth will hit (range of 10 to 100) home runs in 1931.

Fortunately, a comparison can be made here with the prediction and the actual outcome of the event. The average freshmen forecast was 48.5 home runs; sophomore 45.4. Babe Ruth hit 46 home runs that year.

Question 4. The Democrats will win in the Maine State elections in the following years (range from 1932 to 2000).

MOST of the individuals predicted no Democratic victories in Biennial state elections in Maine during the Twentieth Century. Maine, of course, is traditionally a Republican state and the results merely show that the Maine students see no reason why the *status quo* should change.

Question 6. In 2000 the speed record of airplanes will be (range of 400 to 5000 miles per hour).

From recent aeronautic developments, it is evident that the students were not too hopeful in their estimates of the top speed of planes by the end of the century. The freshmen thought it would be between 572 and 1072 miles per hour, while the sophomores were even more pessimistic with 484 to 926 miles per hour.

Question 7. The population of the United States in the year 2000 will be (range of 10,000,000 to 500,000,000).

The population of this country is expected to increase to more than twice its present figure, to 286,750,000.

Question 8. The population of Maine in the year 2000 will be (range of 100,000 to 3,500,000).

The Maine students were more conservative in their estimates of the population growth of their state as compared to that of the U. S.

Question 9. In 3000 the population of the world will be (range from 0 to 1,000,000,000,000,000).

Some individuals believed that in more than a thousand years from now the population of the world will have completely disappeared, whereas some estimated that there will probably be a quadrillion inhabitants. Averages indicated close to the one trillion mark.

Question 10. In 3000 the average span of life in years will be (range from ½ year to 385 years).

Predictions of the span of life in the year 3000 are uniformly conservative, and do not go far beyond the present span of life. Freshmen thought 71.1 years, sophomore 70.5 years.

Thus predicted the group of non-experts on ten future events. These predictions represent expectations and attitudes toward the future as well as more reflective judgments. It is to be hoped that further tests of a far more reaching nature will soon be conducted in an effort to learn more about the prophetic abilities of individuals.

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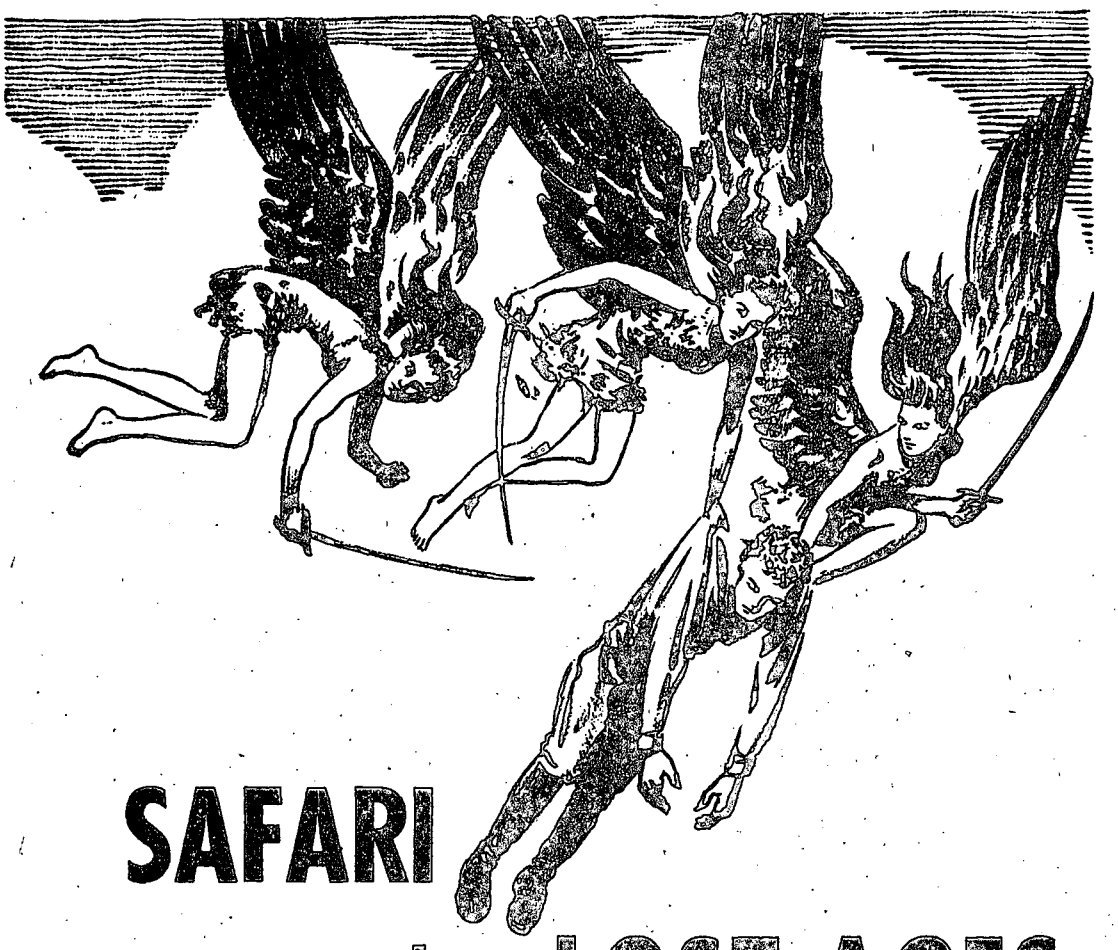
What thing could be so valuable that five people would face certain death in Earth's dim past to gain possession of it?

A horde of winged girls swarmed around the monster, swords flashing



SAFARI to the LOST AGES

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

BARRY RUDD glanced up from the charts on his desk as McGregor, his burly, square-faced assistant, lumbered into his office.

McGregor's red face was redder than usual and there was an outraged gleam in his normally mild eyes.

"Boss," he said hoarsely, "I'm reaching the limits of my patience. No fair man will deny that I've stood for a lot, but this is the final straw. I just can't take any more."

"What's up, Mac?" Barry Rudd asked quizzically.

"It's just this: We're goin' soft as lap dogs on a cream diet. When I think of what we used to be and what we are now I could weep for the shame of it. And it's gone far enough, I tell you. Right now is the time to stop."

The big Scotchman paused and swept a heavy arm about the elaborately furnished office.

"This ain't our style, boss," he said, almost pleadingly. "We don't belong on the two hundred and fifteenth floor of an office building."

Barry Rudd stood up, grinning faint-

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ly. He was a tall young man with solid shoulders and narrow hips. His features were regular and pleasant, but his gray eyes were startlingly out of place in that ordinary face. His eyes were the eyes of a man who has seen everything the world contained and who has found much of it not worth looking at. They were not cynical, but, rather, amused, as if deep inside he were grinning at something that others couldn't see.

"Are you sure it's not spring fever that's bothering you, Mac?" he asked, still smiling.

"Spring fever!" McGregor snorted. "That's not my trouble and you know it. I'll tell you what's bothering me."

"I wish you would," Barry sighed.

"All right. Time travel today is just as common as telephones were a couple of hundred years ago. You can't deny that we had a lot to do with convincing people that it's a safe and sensible pastime. Now that, in a nutshell, is my gripe."

Barry ran his hand through his black kinky hair and laughed.

"I don't follow you, Mac. Sure time travel is safe. If it wasn't we'd be darn soon out of business. If people weren't making vacation excursions into the past there would be little use for our time travel agency, our machines and our services. We organize, equip and direct expeditions into the past. It's a good business. We make nice money. I don't see your complaint."

McGREGOR jammed his hands into his pockets and paced nervously up and down the room, breathing heavily.

"Maybe I can't explain what I feel," he growled. "In the old days we had fun. There was a lot of excitement exploring the past. Sure, it wasn't all coffee and cake, but damn it, it was living. Remember that fracas we had in the twelfth century? The time I got captured by the Saracens and you got there just in time to save me from being cut into sixty-six pieces?"

"I remember," Barry said softly. McGregor's words were churning memories to life within him.

"Now," McGregor went on disgustedly, "we're acting as nursemaids for a lot of tittering school teachers who don't want to go back any farther than their own grandparents. I tell you it ain't right. And this girl is the last straw. She—"

"Girl?" Barry interrupted. "What girl?"

"Didn't I tell you?" McGregor stopped pacing. "I guess I was so mad I forgot all about it."

"I guess you did," Barry said drily.

"She's out in the reception room now," McGregor continued moodily. "She wants to see you."

"Why didn't you send her in?" Barry asked.

"I was just going to," McGregor said guiltily, "when all of a sudden I looked at her and got mad all over. I told her to wait and *I* came in to get this off my chest."

Barry sat down behind his desk and toyed with a pencil with lean strong fingers.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked ironically. "She must be pretty terrible if the mere sight of her caused you to explode like this."

"There's nothing wrong with her," McGregor muttered. "She's little and pretty with great big eyes. But she's either a college dame or a society debutante. I could tell that from her clothes."

"Very shrewd of you," Barry said with faint sarcasm.

"You don't get what I mean," Mc-

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Gregor said miserably. "If we start taking business like that we're sunk forever. She'll probably want us to take a party of young punks back fifty or sixty years for a party or something. Or maybe she'll want an expedition for a sorority initiation." The big Scotchman shuddered visibly at the thought. "Don't you see, boss," he went on desperately, "if we start sending out joy rides like that we're through. Let me tell her you aren't in. Then let's lock the door of this office and throw the key away. That's the only way we'll ever get away."

"It's a tempting idea," Barry said thoughtfully, "but it's out of the question right now. Maybe when we get ourselves straightened out financially we can make a break like that. Now you'd better show the young lady in before she decides to take her business somewhere else."

"All right," McGregor grumbled mournfully, "but wait and see. You're making a mistake."

WHEN the girl walked into his office, Barry received a start. McGregor had neglected to say that she was extraordinarily beautiful. Her hair was long and dark and her eyes were the clearest, deepest and bluest that Barry had ever seen. There was a lithe grace in her stride as she approached his desk.

He stood up and held a chair for her.

"Thank you," she said. "You're Barry Rudd, aren't you?"

"Guilty," he smiled. "What can I do for you?"

She didn't answer immediately. Instead her deep eyes regarded him thoughtfully, almost appraisingly.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"I don't think so," she said slowly. "You've changed a little, but not too much."

"Changed?" Barry asked, mystified. "Have we met before?"

"No," the girl said, "we haven't met before. But five years ago, Mr. Rudd, you were a special hero of mine. I suppose every girl in her teens has one. I collected all the pictures and stories of you that I ran across and pasted them into a scrapbook. I followed your career as closely as I could. It used to be my fondest dream that I could go with you on one of your exciting trips into the deep past."

Barry ran a finger under his collar uncomfortably.

"That's very nice," he said awkwardly, "but why are you telling me this now?"

"Because," the girl said quietly, "I need the Barry Rudd of five years ago. I need the Barry Rudd who laughed at the danger of time travel, who loved the excitement of it, who flashed deeper into the past than any man has since, and did it with a smile on his lips. There was something about that Barry Rudd that made him seem a knight in shining armor to a silly sixteen year old girl. I'm wondering if the armor is still shining, Mr. Rudd."

Barry sat down behind his desk, face expressionless. He cupped his chin in his hands and stared steadily at the girl.

"Suppose you tell me what you want?" he suggested quietly.

The girl leaned forward eagerly and Barry noticed that her small hands were clasped together, the knuckles whitening with strain.

"My name is Linda Carstairs," she said. "My father, Professor Carstairs, traveled into the past about three months ago. His trip was supposed to be a very brief one. In fact he only took food enough for three or four days. He was accompanied by his laboratory assistant. They haven't returned."

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"I remember reading about it," Barry said. "As I recall they were going back to the fourth century. Is that correct?"

"No, it isn't," the girl said evenly. "For some reason or other there was a great deal of secrecy about the purpose of the trip and father didn't announce his real destination. Actually he was planning on traveling much deeper than the fourth century."

BARRY straightened up, a flicker of interest in his eyes.

"Just where was he going?"

"He was attempting to reach the era before the North American ice age," the girl answered. "He estimated it at thirty thousand years B.C."

"Thirty thousand years B.C." Barry muttered. "Whatever put an idea like that in your father's head?"

"Oh, I don't know," Linda Carstairs said helplessly. "It was necessary and that was sufficient reason for him."

Barry was silent for a moment. Then he said,

"And you want me to go after him? Is that why you came here?"

"I know he isn't dead," Linda said passionately. "Everyone has told me I'm crazy for thinking that, but it isn't a matter of logic or reason. It's something I feel inside me. I came here because I felt you were the one person who could help me. Please, won't you?"

Barry suddenly found it impossible to meet her eyes. He dropped his gaze to the pencil he held in his hands.

"You must realize," he said uncomfortably, "that what you are asking is practically impossible. It just isn't feasible. Besides the expense and the danger there's the possibility that your father—, I mean, well, we might not find any trace of him."

Barry lifted his eyes to the girl's and what he saw there brought a stain of color to his cheeks. It wasn't actually contempt. Worse, it was something close to pity.

"I'm sorry to have troubled you," she said, standing up. "I was looking for a man by the name of Barry Rudd, but I seem to be about five years late."

Linda Carstairs pleaded with Barry Rudd to search for her father

She turned on her slender ankles and started for the door, but not so quickly that Barry didn't see the trembling of her firm small chin.

The door opened before she reached it, and McGregor stuck his big red face into the room.

"Well, boss," he said resignedly, "I suppose we've got ourselves a job, eh?"

In the next brief instant Barry Rudd did a lot of thinking. He thought of the

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comfortable, safe existence he was enjoying, the sensible, dependable business he was building, and he wasn't pleased.

He thought of Linda Carstair's deep blue eyes and the look of contemptuous pity that he had seen in them and he wasn't pleased with that either.

He stood up and there was a reckless smile on his lips. A smile that had been absent for almost five years.

"Miss Carstairs," he said suddenly. "Please don't go. I've changed my mind."

"I knew it," growled McGregor. "Now we are sunk."

Linda Carstairs was half way through the door when Barry spoke. She stopped dead and turned slowly, almost as if she didn't trust her ears. When she saw the smile on his face her eyes changed to stars.

"I wasn't wrong," she breathed. "I wasn't too late."

McGregor scowled at the floor.

"What kind of a stunt are we in for now?" he demanded of Barry.

Barry solemnly removed the office keys from his pocket and tossed them to him.

"You may lock the office," he said, "and then throw those as far away as you can. We're nomads again."

"Hot dog!" McGregor yelped. "How far, boss?"

"It's the jackpot this time," Barry said, "thirty four thousands years should do it."

McGregor had a hard time swallowing.

CHAPTER II

30,000 Years Into the Past

IT TOOK a week to make the necessary arrangements. Barry checked every detail of the trip personally. It was while he was checking a long list of supplies, frowning absorbedly at the items listed, that the door of his office opened and Linda Carstairs entered.

With her was a tall, heavyset man of about thirty-five years. He had a frank, open face, and blond, almost wheat-colored hair. His eyes were a pale blue, surprisingly keen and intense. The tweeds he wore fitted him well, giving his bigness a smooth, trimmed-down look.

Barry shoved the papers from him and stood up.

"Mr. Rudd," Linda smiled at him, "this is my fiance, Bruce Allerton. Bruce was one of my father's closest friends."

The men shook hands.

"Glad to know you, Allerton," Barry said. He appraised the other man carefully. You're not good enough for her, he found himself thinking. This was a foolish, illogical thought, and he smiled wryly to himself. What difference did it make to him?

"Thanks," Allerton said, smiling affably. "I've heard a lot about you from Linda. And of course I've read all about your adventurous past." His glance dropped to the desk, swept over the charts and specifications. "Don't take a chance on anything slipping up, do you?"

"No," Barry answered, "we don't. If you've ever time-traveled you'll realize that there are enough unknown factors to meet, without adding to them by carelessness or oversight."

"Bruce understands that," Linda said quickly, "he's had some experience with time travel himself. He made all the arrangements for father's trip. Father wouldn't trust the last minute inspections to anyone but Bruce."

Her attitude was defensive and Barry smiled.

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"I'm sure he's very capable," he said diplomatically.

"It's because I understand some of the risks you're taking," Allerton said, "that I objected to Linda's going with you."

"Going with me?" Barry raised an eyebrow and glanced at Linda. "It's the first I've heard of it."

"I didn't tell you," Linda said, blushing, "because I knew you'd object. But I *am* going. This means everything to me."

BARRY noticed her grimly set jaw and sighed.

"Okay," he said. "As long as you realize what you're letting yourself in for it's all right."

Allerton objected, "But it's very likely to be dangerous, darling."

"I don't care," Linda said stubbornly.

"All right," Allerton shrugged his big shoulders philosophically, "if that's the way you want it. But if you think I'm going to let you tackle this thing alone you're crazy. If you go, I go."

"Now, Bruce," Linda said softly, "that's sweet of you, but I really—"

"That's final," Allerton said. "If you go, I go. How do you think I'd feel if anything happened to you? You know I'd never forgive myself."

"Okay, okay," Barry said, feeling suddenly irritable, "this is not a sight seeing tour we're taking, but it's your own business if you want to come along. We're arranging to leave tomorrow night about nine o'clock. Allerton, bring along a complete set of equipment, clothes, guns and gear for yourself. Miss Carstairs, you do the same. Get metal-fabric clothes that will take a beating and don't forget inhalators. We'll have to leave from approximately the same position that your father did. Now here's something else I'd like to know. Can either of you give me any reason that might have influenced Professor Carstairs to travel thirty-thousand years into the past?"

Allerton shook his head.

"I was pretty close to the professor," he said, "but I don't know why he made the trip. His work here was concerned with synthetic energy. He was making very wonderful strides. As a matter of fact the company which he and I established to distribute his invention is just starting to expand."

"And you?" Barry glanced at Linda. "You can't think of any reason either?"

The girl shook her head.

"Okay," Barry said. "Until tomorrow night you'll have to excuse me. I've got a million things to do." . . .

The time ship was designed in the shape of an ovoid, almost forty feet long. Its brilliant gleaming surface refracted light at what seemed odd angles and this peculiarity created the optical effect that the sides of the ship were pulsating in shimmering waves.

Barry and McGregor stood by the open door of the ship making an exhaustive last minute check-up of supplies and equipment.

"Well," McGregor muttered, scratching his unruly red hair, "I think we're all set."

He was dressed in smooth metal-fabric breeches and knee-high leather boots. A heat resistant helmet with an inhalator attached was dangling from the thick belt at his waist.

Barry's keen eyes traveled carefully over the duffel bags which were stacked outside the ship. Then he glanced impatiently at his watch.

"We're ready," he said. "Linda and Allerton should be here any minute."

He turned and stepped through the door into the interior of the ship. Small, brilliant phosphorescent lights set into the ceiling every few feet bathed the

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ship with brightness.

The three crew members glanced up and Barry nodded to them.

"All set?" he asked.

One of them, a tall thin man with leathery, wrinkled skin and sharp, blue eyes, turned from the intricate controls

"This is not a sight-seeing tour," Barry warned

of the ship and said,

"Never be more so." He grinned and went on, "Seems like old times, doesn't it?"

BARRY smiled fleetingly and the effect on his face was interesting. The hard, almost cold lines of his mouth softened and his gray eyes brightened.

"Yes, Upton," he said, "it does. We've made a lot of these trips together."

The man called Upton wiped his hands on his breeches.

"We're going a long way this time," he said soberly. "Any idea of what we'll find back that far?"

"We'll find trouble," Barry stated matter-of-factly. He turned to the other two crew members who were stacking concentrated packages of food into the small, compact compartments of the ship.

"When you're through," he told them, "start stacking the gear into the ship. We aren't waiting for anyone."

When he left the ship he saw that it was almost dark. McGregor was a huge shadow against the blackness.

"They haven't showed yet, eh?" Barry said grimly. "Do they think this is a suburban bus that leaves every hour?"

The time ship was resting in an enclosed area about a half mile from the laboratory where Professor Carstairs had departed.

"Maybe," McGregor said hopefully, "they changed their minds."

"Women," Barry said disgustedly, "never change their minds except when you'd rather they didn't."

As if in direct substantiation of this remark the door of the enclosure opened and Bruce Allerton and Linda Carstairs appeared.

Linda ran forward, Allerton following.

"I hope we aren't late," Linda said breathlessly.

"You're on time," Barry said. He realized that he sounded curt and he was irritated with himself for it. Subconsciously he had been hoping she would be late, so he would have something to grumble about.

Linda climbed into the ship without answering and Allerton stepped forward.

"Everything ready, skipper?" he asked jovially.

Barry noticed that two bulky ray guns were strapped to his waist. As a rule only show-offs and fools carried two weapons like that, but he had the impression that Allerton was neither a

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show-off or a fool. The guns seemed perfectly at home and Allerton looked as if he would know what to do with them if the need arose.

The two crew members had loaded the gear into the ship now and Barry, with a last quick look about, said,

"Let's go. The sooner we get started the sooner we'll be back."

"That sounds encouraging," Allerton said. "I hope it works out that way."

Barry entered the ship after McGregor and Allerton had closed the door behind him.

In the lighted interior he saw that Allerton was attired the same as he and McGregor and the crew members, but when he glanced at Linda his mouth settled into a thin straight line.

She was wearing a boy's shirt and absurdly small boots, but instead of breeches, she wore a short, metal-fabric skirt that failed by several inches to cover her bare knees.

She caught his glance and blushed.

"I'm sorry if I seem to stare," Barry said with a grim smile, "but I was just wondering about the practicality of that skirt if we have to make a trek through insect infested underbrush. Didn't I tell you to get breeches?"

"Y-yes," Linda said, "but I looked atrocious in them."

Barry heard McGregor groan softly.

"Okay," he said, "it's too late to do anything about it now."

He strode to the control panel of the ship. For a few moments he made calculations on a line-spiralled chart, then he set two rheostats and moved a calibrated bar into place.

Upton was at his side, his keen eyes moving over the control panel.

"I think that does it," he said to Barry.

Barry nodded. "McGregor," he snapped. "See that the door is sealed and the oxygen vents opened a point."

In a moment McGregor answered, "Everything set, Boss."

Barry's hand closed over a master switch. Then he hesitated and swung about to face the occupants of the ship.

His eyes passed over them slowly.

BRUCE ALLERTON was sitting next to Linda, smoking a cigarette

Barry and McGregor checked everything that went into the ship

calmly. McGregor and the two crew members were standing together at the end of the ship, Upton was at his side. Linda's eyes were on the floor and her cheeks were still faintly flushed. Barry noticed with amusement that she had curled her feet under her and pulled the skirt down over her knees.

"I want one thing understood," he said quietly. "My job is to get this party back safely and I need absolute obedience if I'm going to do it. If that isn't entirely satisfactory to anyone he'd better not go any farther."

Allerton looked up. "Why naturally,

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old man, what you say goes. You can count on me to do just as you wish. That goes for both Linda and myself."

"Fine," Barry said. "If anything should happen to me, McGregor will take over."

He swung back to the control panel and gripped the master switch.

"Here we go," he said.

He shoved the switch forward. . . .

FOR an instant there was a complete silence in the ship, broken only by the movement of the occupants. Then, so lightly at first as to seem only a vibration, a soft humming noise was audible.

Barry's eyes roved swiftly over the instruments.

Then he settled back.

"We're on our way," he said.

"Is this all there is to it?" Linda asked.

Barry nodded. His eyes were half closed and there was a faint smile on his lips.

"It isn't very exciting, is it?" he murmured. "No noise, no flashing lights or dizzying speed."

What he had said was true, he thought. There were no external evidences to amaze or shock a time-traveler. But to those, like himself, who had traveled much, there was something else. It was a feeling, a subtle awareness of cosmic motion. Their time ship, a slim ovoid of gleaming speed, was flashing back through the distant mazes of time, criss-crossing from layer to layer, sinking deeper and deeper into the labyrinthine depths of the unguessable past. It was lifting the veil of mystery that guarded the secret of the cosmos and, at the same time, it was multiplying that mystery a thousand fold.

It was this nameless sensation that Barry always experienced. A feeling of being an integral, though infinitesimal, part of a larger and more vast system than it was possible to imagine. Some never felt it.

Linda said unexpectedly,

"There *is* something exciting about it." Her voice was hushed and somewhat troubled. "Something you can't describe or analyze, but you feel it, nevertheless.

Allerton laughed, his big voice striking a jarring note in the stillness of the ship.

"What nonsense!" he chuckled.

Barry glanced at him distastefully. Again the thought hit him that Allerton wasn't good enough for Linda Carstairs.

He shrugged and closed his eyes. If he wasn't careful he'd be developing a prejudice against Allerton, founded only on his own foolish ideas.

Gradually, listening to the faint soothing humming, he was able to forget the matter. For a long time he sat before the control panel, hardly moving a muscle.

It was three hours later before he opened his eyes and moved his arms and shoulders.

The humming noise had stopped.

Barry stood up.

"Okay," he said. "Here we are."

CHAPTER III

Barry Meets the Bird-Girls

THERE was silence for an instant in the ship. Then McGregor moved to the door, and Allerton and Linda stood up.

"Careful," Barry said. The interior of the ship was becoming uncomfortably warm. A heavy drop of perspiration dropped from his forehead to the floor.

He stepped ahead of McGregor to

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the door, his hand moving instinctively to the holster at his belt. With a cautious hand he opened the door until a crack of bright light appeared and then he shoved it open all the way, blocking the door with his body.

For a long silent moment he remained in the ship, his eyes traveling about in a wide careful arc. Then he stepped from the ship to the ground, his whipcord muscles tensed and ready. It was only after he had satisfied himself that there was no immediate danger that he waved to McGregor.

"Okay," he said. "It looks safe enough."

The ship had landed in the middle of a small clearing, bounded on four sides by huge green masses of coarse underbrush. The floor of the clearing was covered with a matting of coarse rank grass that was as thick as leather shoe strings.

The air was close and oppressive, hardly stirring the heavy, towering shoots of green brush. The foliage of the forest was dense and foreboding, seeming to brood in a sultry silence.

Linda and Allerton followed McGregor's burly form from the ship. Barry was still taking stock of their environment, his eyes sweeping about the upper branches of the dank, lush undergrowth.

The sky overhead was brilliantly white and the sun, a molten ball of brass on the horizon, still beat hotly on this jungle.

"It's terribly primitive, isn't it?" Linda said at his side.

Barry nodded. "This is the interior of the North American continent, yet it's wilder and more primeval than the darkest spots in the Africa of our time. Your father landed near here. Tomorrow we'll set out with a searching party, scouring the vicinity in widening circles until we find his machine. It's too late to do anything now, but I'm going to take Upton and make sure this is a safe camp site."

"You'll be careful, won't you?"

Barry glanced sideways at her, one of his rare grins breaking the hardness of his face.

"Sure thing," he said. Still smiling he strolled to where McGregor and Upton were clearing the thick matted grass from the ground.

McGregor's broad back was soaking wet and heavy drops of sweat were dripping from his forehead.

"A blighted land, it is," he growled. "I'm lucky if I don't melt away to nothing in this heat."

"It'll do you good," Upton said unsympathetically, "to boil some of that grease out of your system."

"Why, you bag of bones," McGregor roared indignantly, "a canary couldn't get a meal from the meat on your skeleton."

BARRY chuckled to himself as he approached the two men. There was nothing serious in their wrangling. It went on eternally, but good naturedly.

"Upton," he said, "get a couple of rifles and a compass. You and I are taking a short look around. Mac, I want you to set up camp and post a guard until I return. Don't let anyone leave this clearing under any circumstances."

"I got you, boss, McGregor nodded, "but why don't you let me go with you? You may need me."

"You're needed here," Barry said. "Besides, according to Upton, you've got a little too much avoirdupois to make a good hiker."

McGregor scowled down at the matted jungle floor.

"Wait 'til I get a dictionary," he said fiercely, "if avoordewpoise means what

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I think it does, that little shrimp had better look out."

Upton came up then and Barry took a rifle from him. It was a short weapon, with a slim barrel and a heavy, insulated drum attached to the stock. In spite of its unprepossessing appearance it was a savage instrument, capable of stunning a charging animal with one devastating electric blast.

Barry checked its compact, powerful battery and did the same with the revolver at his waist.

Then, with Upton close at his heels, he plunged into the dense jungle. His intention was to circle the camp and make sure that there was no possible danger lurking in the immediate vicinity.

Using a long heavy knife with a razor-sharp edge to hack away the clinging trailers, he plowed on, sinking almost to his ankles in the loamy soil.

The noise of their passage introduced them to the first signs of life they had noticed. From the overhanging boughs above their heads brilliantly plumaged birds flashed into sight and disappeared with shrill, raucous cries. When the birds were motionless it was impossible to detect them against the green background, for their green and brown wing feathers camouflaged them completely. But when they opened their wings their gorgeous breast colorings and inner wing feathers created the illusion that small, noisy rainbows were flitting through the somber green bushes.

It was a half hour later before they came to another clearing, a great deal larger than the one in which their ship had landed.

Barry checked the compass, as they paused to catch a breath. They were both grimy with dirt and damp with sweat.

"We'll cross the clearing," Barry said, slipping the compass back to his pocket, "then circle the camp before returning. Come on."

They started across the clearing, Barry in the lead.

THE sun was just beginning to slide over the far horizon and there was a still, breathless feeling in the close air, as if all the life in this young pulsing jungle had suddenly been stilled.

Barry noticed it and glanced warily about the clearing. The blood-red shafts of light that speared through the towering brush threw grotesque shadows flickering across the open space. In the white, crimson-shot sky, mighty birds, so far off as to appear only as drifting specks, circled restlessly.

Bruce sat calmly alongside of Linda

Suddenly a frenzied flurry of wings beat against the air and a score of birds flashed from the bush, their fear-crazed screams blasting the unnatural silence.

Then Barry heard a ponderous threshing to his right. Wheeling he saw the heavy brushes on that side of the clearing trembling like straws in a gale

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and he felt the matted earth beneath his feet quiver.

Grabbing Upton by the arm, he unslung his rifle.

"Back up!" he said tensely.

The two men were in the middle of the clearing. They were equally vulnerable from all sides, but Barry wanted to retreat from the *thing* whose passage shook the earth like the trip-hammer blows of a giant.

They had not taken more than three steps, cautious backward steps, when a mighty, incredible roar jerked them to a halt, stunned. An instant later a whole wall of matted brush and vegetation crashed to the ground and through this a monstrous animal emerged.

Barry's impressions were too instant, too distorted by the horrifying immediateness of the situation to be reliable, but he had one terrible flashing image of hot, baleful eyes, mighty slavering jaws and huge hooked teeth.

The creature's four powerful legs raised its long scale covered body fully ten feet from the ground. A massive bludgeoning tail lashed viciously back and forth, churning the underbrush into debris. Its scaly back and sides were a dull green in color.

"Don't move!" Barry said softly.

Slowly he raised the rifle to his shoulder, but before he could aim, the mighty creature reared itself on its legs and charged forward.

Dropping to his knees Barry fired desperately, pumping electric blasts into the beast as rapidly as his finger could trigger the rifle.

The charging monster roared horribly. It was no more than fifty feet from them, slithering over the ground with incredible speed. The champing sound of its hideous jaws was like the noise of two boulders grinding together.

"Run!" Barry yelled.

He leaped to his feet, but he had not covered five yards when a terrible, fear-crazed cry sounded behind him. Wheeling, his heart climbed to his throat, as he saw Upton, sprawled on his face, not twenty feet in front of the roaring monster.

A trailing loop of grass had caught his ankle and hurled him to the ground. Barry sprang toward him, whirling the useless rifle about his head with both hands. When he reached Upton's side he hurled the heavy rifle with savage strength at the yawning jaws of the immense beast.

They slashed at the thick underbrush with long, sharp knives

The creature's jaws closed with a greedy snap and Barry heard the rending sound of splintering wood and cracking steel.

Barry jerked Upton to his feet. The giant, crocodile-like monster was so close that its hot, fetid breath swept over them in a nauseating wave.

The two men started to run, but, with incredible swiftness, the gigantic beast slithered around and lashed out with a claw-like paw.

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BARRY hurled himself to the ground, shouting a futile warning to Upton. The forepaw, with its horrible raking talons swept harmlessly over him, but it struck Upton with terrible force, flinging him through the air like a rag doll. When he hit the ground he sprawled grotesquely on his face and lay still.

Sobbing a curse, Barry crawled to his feet and ran toward Upton's limp, queerly huddled figure. Half way there the scale covered beast struck at him.

Barry ducked instinctively and the blow did not land directly, but grazed his shoulder with only partial force. But that was enough to numb the whole side of his body and slam him to the ground with bone shattering force.

Through a misty fog of pain Barry realized that he was lying on his stomach, his face pressed into the coarse matted grass of the jungle floor. Groaning he rolled to his side. The effort took all of his strength. An excruciating pain was leaping along the side of his body and black spots were flickering before his eyes.

The mighty p r i m o r d i a l beast crouched directly in front of him, its thirty foot tail lashing through the grass with the noise of a steam gusher.

Barry tried to struggle to his feet but the effort was too much for his pain-weakened body. He slumped back gasping.

The giant lizard moved toward him, attracted by the motion. Its huge, saber-toothed jaws opened wide and a coarse red tongue licked out greedily.

Instinctively, Barry shrank away. But it was purely a reflective action. His brain was clouding over and a vast weariness was settling in his arms and legs. He tried to fight against the sensation, but it was a futile battle. His eyes closed and his body relaxed limply against the floor of the jungle.

How long he remained in this comatose state he had no way of reckoning. He wasn't unconscious, his brain was still functioning, but the will and the incentive to fight and live were draining from him.

It was a sound that roused him.

One instant the only noise in the jungle had been the breathing of the monstrous reptilian beast and the drumming of his own heart. Then, with an abruptness that shocked him to awareness, the jungle stillness was shattered by the crescendo thunder of mightily beating wings.

Barry fought away the weariness that was enveloping him and forced his eyes open. The incredible sight that met his eyes stunned him to full consciousness.

For diving toward the immense beast were scores of mighty birds, their brilliantly plumaged wings extended to the limit of their great span.

The giant green beast swayed uncertainly, then turned sideways as the thunderous beat of the diving bird's wings grew in volume. They were only a few hundred feet in the air, diving like streaking comets straight for the back of the reptilian monster.

Barry struggled to a sitting position and stared in amazement at the plummeting birds. It was difficult to make out anything but their outlines because they were diving through the last brilliant rays of the setting sun. This coated them with a shining luster that flashed and sparkled as they dropped earthward.

When they were only a hundred feet from the ground, Barry shaded his gaze with his hands and strained his eyes to bring them into a recognizable focus.

When he did see the birds plainly, the breath left his lungs in an incredulous gasp. For the shapes hurtling toward the gigantic beast were not birds

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but—girls, slim, brown skinned girls, with long straight black hair and classically chiseled features. Their mighty wings, a dozen feet from tip to tip, were black and glistering in the lancing light of the setting sun.

IN THE hands of the bird-girls were gleaming swords, curved in viciously efficient designs. Straight at the unprotected back of the beast they launched themselves, their gleaming blades whistling shrilly as they cut through the air.

The attack was of unbelievable savagery. In squads of three and four the bird-girls swooped down, chopping viciously at a spot just behind the neck of the huge green monster.

A roar of baffled rage split the air as the great beast reared on it hind legs and pawed the air in frantic attempts to batter the zooming bird-girls to earth with its huge claws.

Barry sank to the jungle floor, his heart hammering painfully. His pain-racked body was weakening, his senses clouding. The titanic battle raging before his eyes was like some mad fantasy, a distorted figment of imagination that couldn't possibly be real.

Then from the diving ranks of the bird-girls a single figure soared clear and skimmed toward him. Barry watched in fascination as this lone bird-girl dropped to the ground on slim bare feet within a dozen yards of him. At that distance he could be certain that this marvelous creature was a flesh and blood being, and not a product of his imagination.

The magnificent black wings folded over her shoulders like a cloak as she moved closer. He could see her eyes, black and primitive, as devoid of emotion as those of a hawk. A single tawny animal skin covered her lithe brown body, but it did not conceal the grace and symmetry of her savagely beautiful form.

He tried to stand then but the pain brought a wave of giddy nausea that detonated a conflagration of flashing pin wheels in his head. A black-out was imminent but he fought desperately against the approaching oblivion as he saw two more of the bird-girls detach themselves from the attacking group.

The great beast crumbled over on its side—dead

He saw them land and skip over the ground with feline grace toward him. With his last conscious sensation he felt strong hands on his shoulders and arms, and then he felt himself soaring upward with the lightness and buoyancy of a cloud.

That was all he remembered.

CHAPTER IV

The Beast-Men

AS DARKNESS wrapped a black mantle around the glistening time ship and the small camp erected about it, McGregor's impatience turned to anxiety.

His massive body was a heavy shadow against the night as he stalked

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grimly about the clearing, pausing only for frequent glances at luminated dial of his wrist watch.

"The blasted fool!" he growled around the pipe stem which was gripped in the vise of his heavy jaw. He stopped pacing and stared worriedly into the black jungle, in the direction which Barry and Upton had disappeared several hours before.

He didn't hear the light step beside him. The first indication he had that he was not alone was Linda Carstair's unexpected hand on his arm.

"You're worried, aren't you?" she said.

He swung to face her, seeing her small face as a vague indistinct blur in the darkness.

"Yes," he said, almost roughly, "I'm worried about Barry and Upton. They should've been back by this time."

"Possibly they're lost," Linda suggested.

McGregor snorted. "Barry could find his way here blind-folded. No, they're not lost. It's more serious than that."

"Maybe," Linda's voice shook, "they've found my father or have come across his machine."

"I've thought of that," McGregor said. "It's a possibility—but a blasted slim one."

"If they've met some kind of trouble," Linda said, "we shouldn't be wasting time talking about what to do. I think we should set out after them."

"Good girl," McGregor said. There was grudging admiration in his voice. "I had just come to that idea myself. Barry told me not to budge from this site, but you'll be safe with Allerton and what's left of the crew."

"There's no sense in your going alone," Linda said firmly. "If Barry and Upton are in trouble it will take more than one man to get them out of it. The only sensible thing for us to do is lock the ship up and set out after Barry and Upton at dawn."

"Well," McGregor grumbled, "I don't like the idea of taking a woman along on a trip like this."

"Nonsense," Linda said. "I don't intend to remain here so you may consider the matter settled. We'll leave at dawn."

"All right, all right," McGregor muttered helplessly. "We'll leave at dawn."

A shaft of light cut between them as the door of the time ship opened and Bruce Allerton sauntered toward them.

"What's up?" he asked, glancing from McGregor to Linda.

"Barry and Upton haven't returned," Linda explained. "Mr. McGregor is worried and so am I. We've just decided to send out a searching party if they aren't back by dawn."

"That's the logical thing to do," Allerton said, nodding. His gaze shifted to McGregor. "I suppose you plan to take the two crew members with you?"

"I'm takin' everyone with me," McGregor said grimly. "It's Miss Carstair's idea that we make a convention out of it."

"It's the only thing to do," Linda said, turning to Allerton. "Don't you agree, Bruce?"

Allerton laughed nervously. "Really, darling, I'm not sure that it's the wisest course of action. There's no telling what we'll encounter in the way of danger. Of course," he added hastily, "I'm thinking only of you. For myself I wouldn't care."

"Then it's all set," Linda said.

"Yeah," McGregor said drily, "it's all set. We break camp at dawn. . . ."

WHEN the first slanting streaks of gray light slanted through the trees into the clearing, the small party was ready to leave.

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With McGregor's bulky figure leading the way they filed into the dense, trackless jungle, following the faint path that Barry had made the day before.

Linda followed McGregor and Allerton and the two crew members brought up the rear. They had traveled for perhaps an hour when McGregor plunged through a thick tangle of brush into a wide clearing. Instantly he flung up an arm and shouted a warning to the others. Dropping to his knees he jerked a gun from his belt, while his eyes shifted swiftly about the clearing.

The sight that had prompted his action was one of the most amazing he had ever witnessed. In the center of the clearing was the carcass of an immense beast, fully fifty feet long. The jaws of the beast were distended in death, displaying great rows of terrible teeth. Lying on one side, the creature presented a picture of numbing terror. Its green sides were hacked in a hundred places, and in these gashes thousands of insects fed.

He heard Linda gasp in horror as she crowded beside him and saw the monstrous creature sprawled on the floor of the jungle.

Then he saw the sprawled body a few feet from the beast and he climbed to his feet and moved warily toward it, still sweeping the silent surroundings with cautious eyes.

He turned the body on its back and for a long, silent instant regarded the battered, blood-caked features, set in the final rigid expression of death.

When he turned blindly from the sight he saw that Linda and the others were watching him in fascinated horror.

"Upton," he said tonelessly, through stiff lips.

Linda's sob was the only sound to disturb the shocked silence. For a timeless interval no one spoke, then Allerton said quietly,

"There's no sign here of what happened to Barry Rudd. He might be still alive."

McGregor stood still, his big hands clenched, staring at the ground. Finally his eyes moved over the ground, reading the account of what had happened in the battle marked ground.

For long moments he studied the grass covered jungle floor and then he looked up, an expression of wonder on his rugged red features.

"What happened to Barry?" Linda demanded desperately.

McGregor stared at her and ran a hand through his coarse matted hair.

"I don't know," he said huskily. "One guess would be that the tribe which killed that monster captured Barry and carried him off."

"Why do you say tribe?" Allerton asked.

"No one person," McGregor answered grimly, "could possibly have killed that beast. It's almost too much to believe that a hundred men could do it."

"In that case," Allerton said, "I suggest we get back to the time ship as quickly as possible. We aren't prepared to meet a tribe of savage aboriginals."

"We're goin' ahead!" McGregor snapped. "Barry Rudd may be still alive, and as long as there's that chance, we aren't turning back. Make up your mind to that, everyone!"

Allerton shrugged. "You're the boss," he said.

McGregor glanced down at Upton's still body, then said to the two crew members,

"Get your shovels out. We've got a job to do before we go on. . . ."

THE service at Upton's shallow grave was brief. McGregor turned

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from the unmarked bier, his heavy features working. There were unashamed tears in his eyes. Only for an instant did he show the emotion he felt. As he swung his pack to his shoulder his jaw had hardened and the light of battle was in his eyes.

"Come on," he growled, making for the opposite side of the clearing where the green wall of the jungle rose forebodingly.

The rest of the party followed him without hesitation. Allerton and the two crew members gripped their revolvers in their hands and their eyes swept the brush with increased caution.

With McGregor hacking a way for them, the party forced their way deeper and deeper into the dank forest. The immense shoots of brush shot up fifty and seventy-five feet above their heads and the rising sun filtered through the mossy leaves with a pale flickering light. The floor of the jungle was matted and soggy and the tangled swampy underbrush was almost as impenetrable as rusted clusters of barbed wire.

Perspiration streamed down McGregor's broad face and his boots sunk a full six inches into the rotting slimy vegetation that packed the forest ground. His shoulders worked rhythmically as the heavy three-foot knife in his hands swung back and forth, cleaving a swath through the stifling thorny underbrush.

Linda struggled on in his wake. Her bare legs were scratched in a dozen places by the thorny trailers which she brushed against. Her small jaw was set grimly as she forged silently ahead. . . .

It was almost noon and they had been on the march for six hours before McGregor halted. The steaming jungle was as hot as an inferno and the blazing sun at zenith poured a barrage of intolerable heat over them. But it was not because of this that McGregor stopped. Some sixth sense carried a subtle warning to his nerves.

As the small party halted, the big Scotchman turned and swept the silent brooding jungle with worried eyes. He had the feeling that they were not alone, that they were being watched by alien eyes.

"Seen any sign of life?" he asked Allerton.

Allerton shook his head. "I haven't seen or heard a thing," he said.

McGregor still paused uncertainly. The feeling was strong, but there was nothing in the way of concrete evidence to support it. Finally he shrugged and resumed the slow, painful work of hacking a trail through the jungle brush.

He had not covered more than ten yards when he caught sight of something gleaming through the green swampy tangle of shrubs. The shining reflection of light was directly in front of them, not more than fifty yards away.

MC GREGOR approached cautiously, but when he had covered half the distance to the strange object he let out a jubilant whoop.

"Luck's with us," he cried, turning to Linda. "We've found your father's time ship."

Electrified, Linda halted. Then, with a cry, she stumbled forward, following as closely behind McGregor as possible. They reached the time ship almost together and the others were right on their heels.

The time ship was small, eight feet long, six feet high, a slender glistening ovoid, a miniature replica of the one in which they had just spanned the gulf of time. Now, covered with trailers and scraggling brush it looked as amazingly out of place as a dinosaur would in a formal park of the two-hundred and fiftieth century.

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It had obviously been deserted for days for the lush, swiftly growing jungle had crept up, wrapping tentacles and limp leaves about it in a camouflaging embrace. Only a stray glimmer of light had caught McGregor's eyes. Had he missed this they might have passed within twenty feet of the machine without being aware of its existence.

McGregor chopped through the encircling brush and jerked open the door of the machine. The interior of the ship was empty. He stepped into the ship and flicked on the lights. One sweeping glance of inspection showed him that everything in the ship was in perfect order. No signs of a disturbance. He noticed a small can of concentrated vitafood and two plates resting on a table near the wall.

Everything indicated that the professor and his assistant had left the ship intending to return but quite obviously they hadn't.

Linda had followed him into the ship and as he turned he saw the misery on her face and the expression of wordless despair in her eyes.

"Don't give up, yet," he said. "There's still a chance of finding your father and we won't quit as long as there is a chance."

"You said that of Barry," Linda said hopelessly.

"And I mean it," McGregor said grimly. "I don't quit easily. Right now I'm going to scour this ship from top to bottom to see if I can find a clue as to where your father was heading for. You better wait outside. There isn't room in here for both of us to turn around in."

WHEN the girl had left, McGregor dropped to his knees and rummaged through the small compact drawers, making guesses as to what equipment and clothes were missing. Then he inspected the delicate machinery with a keen practiced eye.

After a complete inspection of all the multiple devices necessary to time navigation and a careful look at the energy tubes, he rose to his feet, a worried frown cutting a furrow over his eyes.

For a long moment he stood still, hands jammed into his pockets.

He was thinking. It was a process which he generally did not bother much about, but now it was forced on him. He had learned something—something ugly and disagreeable, and its implications affected the safety of what was left of his party.

A grim hardness settled along his heavy jaw and a dangerous gleam of anger frosted in his eyes, as he realized what he must do.

He wheeled and stepped toward the door of the ship, but before he reached it a shrill cry sounded—the terrible, marrow-chilling scream of a woman in mortal fear. It was followed by a bestial chorus of hoarse roaring shouts, and the swift rush of heavy feet.

McGregor's big hands balled into fists as he sprang through the door of the ship. Linda and Allerton and the crew members were fighting for their lives against a dozen shaggy, savage cave men, who had apparently materialized from the brooding emptiness of the jungle.

One sweeping glance stamped this scene on his mind, then he was leaping forward into the fray, a hoarse battle yell springing from his throat.

The cave men attackers were huge, massively muscled creatures, with lustful piggish eyes and slanting foreheads covered with coarse matted hair. Loin clothes of animal skin were their only covering, the rest of their haircovered hides being naked.

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In their hands they carried thick clubs, studded with sharp rocks bound into place with leather thongs. The leader of the savage horde, a roaring giant of a man, carried a peculiar hammer-shaped club, formed by a huge shining rock set in the forked end of a

The cave men rushed forward

stout stick. As this sub-human beast leaped toward one of the crew members, he swung the hammer in a glittering arc above his head.

McGregor sprang at the massive brute who was struggling with Linda. With the force of a pile driver his mallet-like fist crashed into the bestial creature's face. The blow caught the cave man by surprise. With a hoarse grunt of pain he sprawled to the ground, his slavering jaw hanging queerly.

Jerking his gun from his belt McGregor shot the man before he could arise. With a protecting arm around Linda's shoulders the big Scotchman swung the deadly muzzle of the gun about to cover the remainder of the attacking horde.

But before he could fire the giant leader of the band reached the crew member, who faced him desperately. The swinging, blazing hammer descended in a blinding arc, striking the crew member a terrible blow.

INSTANTLY the hammer head seemed to explode, great lances of brilliant light forked out and a rending, ear splitting detonation shattered the air. The crew member was hurled to the ground by the force of the blast, his whole torso blackened and charred by the fiery fury of the strange weapon.

With a hoarse scream of triumph the giant cave man sprang over the lifeless body, the hammer swinging again.

McGregor fired frantically at his lunging figure but his electrical pellets were wide of their mark. Other cave men were rushing at him and he swung the gun about and blazed directly into their midst. Some stumbled and went down, black holes bored through their heads and bodies, but the rest charged relentlessly at him, their small, piggish eyes glaring with a murderous rage.

To his left McGregor heard another burst of thunderous noise and he could feel the scorching heat of the strange weapon singeing his clothes.

The butt of the gun in his hand was dangerously hot, but there was nothing to do but keep firing. Then it happened. His finger closed on the trigger and the gun did not respond. It had jammed or burned out. With a curse McGregor hurled the gun straight into the face of the nearest charging cave man. He swung Linda behind him and lashed out with his fists. The suddenness of this new attack bewildered the savage attackers for an instant. Two of them sprawled to the ground

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under the sledge hammer blows of his swinging fists, before they reorganized their ranks and charged in a tight unified body.

A club struck his forehead driving him to his knees, but still he fought. Blood was streaming into his eyes and his arms seemed as heavy as anchors but his indomitable will kept them pumping, slugging, flailing even as the irresistible wave of huge bodies swept over him crushing him to the earth.

He heard Linda scream, then another blast of sound enveloped him, driving every last vestige of will and consciousness from his mind. It was the last he remembered.

CHAPTER V

Human Sacrifice?

BARRY Rudd regained consciousness slowly. It was like emerging gradually from darkness to light. One instant he was falling, deliberately and inevitably, but slowly, like an aimlessly drifting feather, through foggy darkness; then as his senses cleared he felt the air rushing against his cheeks and he realized that he was dropping as swiftly as a plummet.

His eyes were closed but he could feel the claw-like grips on his shoulders, and hear a mighty thunder of driving wings over his head. Memory returned to him then. With dreadful clarity he recalled the onslaught of the monster, the death of Upton, the incredible attack of the bird-girls, his own black-out.

These fleeting, lightning-swift realizations flashed across his mind, almost too quickly for assimilation.

Before he had time to appreciate their implications, his feet scraped a hard surface, the grips on his shoulders released, and he plunged forward on his face.

The jarring fall brought him back to full consciousness. Opening his eyes he saw that he was lying in the center of what appeared to be a large, rock-floored valley. This impression was dispelled when he struggled to a sitting position and saw a vast domed ceiling extending cone-shaped to a small opening hundreds of feet above his head. Through this round opening in the ceiling daylight poured, illuminating the vast hall with a hazy, imperfect light.

A slight sound behind him attracted his attention. Turning, he saw two of the slender, imperious bird-girls regarding him with their emotionless black eyes.

It was obvious that they had brought him to this strange place after killing the monstrous jungle reptile, but their motive for doing so was completely incomprehensible to him. Why had they brought him here? Why had they saved his life in the first place?

These questions were burning in his mind as he studied the incredible bird-girls, but he realized that he was not to learn the answers, at least for a while. For the bird-girls were preparing to leave.

A swift look flashed between them, an unspoken decision was reached and one of the girls leaped into the air, her great wings drumming mightily as she soared upward, circling toward the opening at the apex of the ceiling.

Entranced, Barry followed the bird-girl's slim graceful form as it flashed above him, in ever-ascending circles. As she reached the round opening her slim body with outspread wings was silhouetted for an instant against the streaming light—then she was gone.

The other girl leaped into the air, but the drumming of her wings was drowned out by another sound that broke suddenly in the vast, vaulted chamber.

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THE new sound was a hoarse cry, shouted by dozens of roaring, raging voices. Barry twisted and saw that from a number of narrow niches in the walls, men were pouring. Men with thick, hairy chests, mighty arms and legs and sloping bestial foreheads. In their hands were primitive clubs and stone axes. As this terrifying horde charged forward, their long arms swung before them, knuckles grazing the ground, and their hoarse voices rose in a raging, demoniacal scream.

Barry was too stunned by their terribly swift appearance to do anything but helplessly watch, but the bird-girl's wings beat the air violently and frantically as she heard the soul-chilling chorus of their voices.

Barry saw her flash a terrified glance over her shoulder. Fear was stamped on her proud lean features and her savage dark eyes flashed like those of a trapped animal.

She was almost twenty feet above the ground and gaining altitude with every second, but the raging horde of savage men were redoubling their speed. The concentration of the pack was centered on the flying girl, their howling scream seemed to be directed against her and none of them paid any attention to Barry.

When the leaders of the horde reached the spot they apparently realized that the girl was beyond their reach, for their screams of rage doubled in volume and they leaped futilely into the air, flecks of froth drooling over their tusk-like teeth.

One of them drew back his arm and flung his club wildly into the air, but it was wide of its mark. The bird-girl was almost fifty feet above their heads, flying frantically for the narrow aperture at the ceiling that meant escape and freedom.

The action of this one savage was a signal to the others. Almost immediately the rest of the pack were hurling their clubs into the air and screaming with disappointment as the missiles missed their mark.

Barry found himself tensely praying that the girl would make her escape. For some unknown reason she had befriended him and, for an equally unknown reason, these monsters were enraged at her.

The stone ax slashed into her wing

It was just at the moment that she seemed certain of escape that it happened. She was wheeling in a narrow circle, her great wings extended to their fullest spread, when a stone axe, spinning through the air with incredible speed, slashed into her right wing.

Her thin cry of pain went through Barry like a knife. A roar of bestial exultation sprang from the horde as the bird-girl fell toward the ground, her uninjured wing beating mightily in a desperate but futile attempt to check her fall. The injured wing, hung at a sharp angle, broken and helpless.

When her slim swiftly dropping body

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struck the rocky floor, a half dozen of the pack leaped for her, clubs raised. Had she moved she would probably have been battered to death at the same instant, but her body was motionless, lying limply on the ground, one splendid wing thrown wide, the other, shrunken and twisted, folded close to her.

For a second the pack hesitated, then they dropped their clubs and after a moment of fierce guttural babbling among themselves, they picked up the bird-girl's limp form and started away with it.

AT THE same instant the remainder of the horde swung on Barry. He had been expecting this and, with an effort he rose to one knee, resolved to die fighting. But the intentions of the savage pack were not murderous. Ignoring his feeble resistance two of the burly creatures grabbed his arms, two others grabbed his legs and they lifted him from the ground and carried him after the cluster of savages who were bearing the bird-girl.

Across the wide rocky floor and into one of the narrow niches, which was actually a small hallway leading off the larger room, they carried him. Illumination was provided by torches of blazing ropes which were stuck into the walls, casting a smoky flickering light over the dim musty passageway.

For several moments the pack of brutish, ragged men tramped on in stolid silence, the shuffling tramp of their feet being the only sound to disturb the clammy stillness. Then the passageway widened out and merged with a larger room, hung with imperfectly treated hides and floor coverings of matted rope. The low ceiling was burned black from the guttering of smoke from the many blazing torches and several primitive couches of stone were set against the rock walls.

Barry was deposited without ceremony on one of these couches and the men turned and filed out of the room, the muffled tramp of their footsteps gradually fading away into silence.

Alone, Barry sat up carefully and examined his leg and hip. The bruise was still painful, but the throbbing had stopped and he was satisfied that no bones were broken. Then he stood up and inspected the rude room. A quick glance was all that was required for this. There were no openings or windows, but in the corners he saw narrow crevices through which the smoke was drawn from the room. These flues helped but little. Great clouds of dirty smoke seemed to congeal in the middle of the room and hang there like some evil spectre.

He had completed his brief examination of the quarters when he heard a sound behind him. Turning quickly he gave a gasp of pure relief.

For a man stood in the entrance of the room.

Not a sub human, apish creature, but a small, gray-haired man with intelligent blue eyes and lean, kind features. This man wore a faded, ragged shirt, grimy breeches and knee boots. Barry's relief at seeing a human being was so intense, that he couldn't speak.

"Sorry if I startled you," the man said, smiling.

Barry drew a shaky breath. "It was the most pleasant shock I've received in a long time," he said. It was then that the significance, the import of this man's presence hit him.

"You're Professor Carstairs, aren't you?" he demanded. "Linda Carstairs' father."

"Why, yes," the blue eyes twinkled, "I do happen to be Professor Carstairs. How did you happen to know me?"

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Barry sat down weakly on one of the stone couches.

"It's a long story," he said. . . .

WHEN he had finished talking tiny furrows of worry lined the professor's face. For several moments he was silent, one hand drumming nervously on his knee. Then he said:

"It was like Linda to set out after me, but I'd feel better if I knew she was safely at home. Frankly there's nothing she or the other members of her party could do to rescue us, even if they did happen to discover that we are being held."

"Are you sure?" Barry asked quietly. "Is there no way to escape from this place?"

Professor Carstairs smiled fleetingly and shrugged.

"Perhaps I shouldn't speak with authority because as it happens, I haven't tried to escape. Still, my opinion would be that such a venture would be impossible. Now, I will tell you my story. I came here to this remote age because my research indicated that it was at approximately this time that the Germanic legends were in embryo, so to speak. The legend I was particularly concerned with was that which dealt with the Thunder God, known as Thor. Every mythology has a counterpart of Thor. The Romans called him Vulcan; the Indians called him Twakstrie, and so forth. My belief is, or was, that these legends were based on fact, that a thunder god, and thunder hammer, had existed. Since my work is in the field of synthetic energy you can understand what it would mean to me if I could discover and analyze the original hammer of Thor. There, I might find the secret, the keystone, to the solution of the problem of synthetic energy."

"I gather," Barry interrupted, "that you haven't found any trace of the hammer."

The professor nodded slowly. "My companion and I arrived at this age without difficulty, but in our first foray into the foreboding jungle we stumbled upon a party of these Cro-Magnon creatures. In the struggle my companion was killed. I was brought here and have been here since."

"Why," Barry asked, "have they kept you alive?"

"As to that," the professor answered, "I can only surmise that I, and you also, are being reserved for some very special manner of elimination. I have given some study to the monolithic inscriptions on the walls of these caves and the most prevailing one is that of sacrificial rites, coincident, as nearly as I can figure, with the full periods of the moon. It is therefore not a bad guess that you and I are scheduled to slake the blood thirst of one of their disagreeable gods."

THE professor spoke blandly, almost cheerfully, but there was no mistaking the undertone of grimness in his words.

"There must be something we can do," Barry said quietly, "I'm not in the habit of quitting without a fight. How far do you suppose this place is from where you left your time ship?"

"Not terribly far," the professor answered thoughtfully. "As I recall we had only marched a few hours when I was able to sight the mountain top under which these caves have been tunneled. You might not have noticed it but the main chamber of this unique place is simply the inner core of a long extinct volcano. From that dead core our industrious hosts chiseled deep into the interior of the mountain until they have literally honeycombed it with their caves. It was a measure made expedi-

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ent by the great number and variety of ferocious carnivora which roam the jungles. If you plan to escape, my friend, remember that fact well. You will be forced to cover miles of swampy jungle, infested with the most malignant types of reptiles and animals. That is doubtless why my hosts have given me a good deal of freedom about the place. They respect my intelligence sufficiently to realize that I would not be rash enough to dare the dangers of the jungle alone."

"You are not alone now," Barry said with quiet emphasis.

The professor's mild blue eyes met Barry's and his frail shoulders shrugged wearily.

"My young friend," he said softly, "I admire your will and I respect your courage. But I am afraid they will be of no use here."

"One more thing," Barry said after a pause, "I've told you about the bird-girls, but you didn't comment. What is your opinion of them?"

"More guess work," the professor replied. "They are represented in the monolithic inscriptions, so it is safe to assume they have existed for quite some time. Possibly they are the source of the Valkyries, the beautiful bird-girls, of the Germanic mythology. At any rate they are an extremely interesting mutation. Mother Nature in her wisdom might have equipped these daughters of hers with wings to enable them to survive the dangers they would meet in the plains. With wings, even the most ferocious dinosaur can be eluded. In their countenance, as you have described them, there is a definite resemblance to the North American Indian, who is still buried thousands of years in the future. That is another speculation. Why they helped you I can, again, only guess. They might reason that you were of their type, as opposed to the beast you were fighting. Therefore their sympathies were with you and they came to your aid. What to do with you then became their problem. Since they know that the cave men live in the volcano, and since you resembled the cave men, the logical thing was for them to bring you here, which they did. The reception they received will undoubtedly serve to stifle any such charitable inclinations which might arise in the future."

Barry twisted slightly and a twinge of pain shot up his side.

The professor's keen eyes caught his wince.

"Your're hurt," he said anxiously. "I'm an old fool for gabbing on like this. Lie down on these skins and I'll bring some salve and bandages. I had them with me when I was captured. Then you'll need some broth and a night's sleep to put you on top of the world. Do as I say now."

Barry obeyed the suddenly decisive professor meekly.

"One thing though," he said, "the girl they captured looked as if she might be hurt. I'd feel better if you'd see if there's anything you can do for her."

"All right, all right," the professor said testily, "I'll look after everybody in the ward but first of all I want to look after you."

WHEN the professor had dressed the ugly scratches and bruises on his side and fed him a deep wooden bowl full of steaming broth, Barry relaxed against the comfortable warmth of the thick skins. He was not worried about the party he had brought back to this savage past. They were, he knew, in McGregor's capable hands. The realization that he might never again see the big Scotchman gave him a deep wrench. Surprisingly, however, he had

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the same sensation when he thought of never seeing Linda Carstairs again.

He dozed off, still unable to make sense out of his thoughts and emotions.

The professor awakened him. After another meal he felt almost up to normal. The rest and food had performed a miracle on his tired, weakened system. Strength was flowing again through the muscles of his hard, well packed body.

The professor fed him from a deep wooden bowl

"You look like a different man," the professor said, "Naturally that is gratifying for I take full credit for my patient's recovery. I regret to say my other patient is not doing as well."

"The girl?" Barry asked quickly. "You've seen her?"

The professor nodded.

"They have locked her away in a small cave. They are all extremely elated over her capture. She will, I imagine, be put to use during one of their sacrificial ceremonies, if she lives that long."

"Why do you say that?" Barry asked.

"She will not eat," the professor said. "She will languish away inside of a week, like any wild thing in captivity. Probably it is the kindest thing that could happen to her."

"Could I see her?" Barry asked.

Possibly," the professor said thoughtfully. "Keep close to me. I have freedom here, because the cave men all feel immensely superior to me physically. Mentally, too, I suppose," he added wryly.

With the professor in the lead they left the small smoky chamber and followed a narrow corridor for several hundred feet. Rooms branched off this tunnel and Barry had quick glimpses of the living quarters of the cave men. Great slovenly females and savage wiry children peered curiously at him as he walked past.

They met several males lumbering along in the opposite direction, but the only attention they received was a noncommittal grunt.

"I think it's going to be all right," the professor said. With a smile, he added, "The males, fortunately, feel superior to you, too."

At the end of this corridor the professor stopped. He pointed to a heavy door, made of slabs of wood bound together with leather thongs and hinged by the same device.

"She is in there," he said.

A torch cast an eerie smoky yellow light over the door and through its chinks. Through one of these Barry was able to see the interior of the small, rock-walled room. It took an instant to adjust his eyes to the poorly lighted enclosure but when he did he saw the girl, a dark motionless shape, crouched in the farthest corner of the room. He could not see her face, but in the semi-darkness, her brilliant dark eyes

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gleamed like two tiny flames.

Listening he could hear her breathing, harshly, fearfully, as if each shuddering breath were to be her last. It was that sound, piteously terrible, that spurred him to action.

"There must be something we can do," he said determinedly.

"It's no use," the professor protested. "I placed a bowl of broth before her earlier today, but she won't touch it. There's nothing you can do."

BARRY didn't bother answering. Quickly he untied the leather thongs that secured the door, opened it and stepped inside the room. The light from the corridor fell across the floor, cutting a swath through the darkness, affording him a clear view of the girl.

She crouched against the wall as he moved cautiously toward her, her gleaming eyes darting about as if seeking escape.

The tendons in her throat were taut and strained, and her lips were drawn in pain from her strong teeth.

Barry stopped in the middle of the room and for several minutes remained absolutely motionless. Then he slowly eased himself on one knee and picked up the crude wooden bowl of broth. He waited again and then slowly extended it toward the girl.

She crouched away from the extended bowl.

Barry held it out until his arm was tired, then he set it again on the floor. He tried this twice again with no success.

Then he held the bowl to his own lips and drank. The girl watched him with narrowed eyes. After a pause he extended the bowl to her. She hesitated, tremblingly indecisive, then crouched away again.

Barry drank again, but the girl would not take the bowl from him. In despair he set the broth down and left the room.

"It's useless," Professor Carstairs said.

"I guess you're right," Barry said glumly. He closed the door discouragedly. Then he heard a strange sound from inside the room. Putting his eyes to one of the larger chinks, he saw that the girl had picked up the bowl and was drinking the broth, her bright eyes still staring steadily over the rim of the bowl at the door.

He grabbed the professor excitedly and pulled him to the door.

The professor looked for an instant then cocked his head appreciatively.

"Well, well," he said, a deep satisfaction in his voice, "she gurgles her soup like a lady. My boy, you have unexpected resources."

The next day they returned to the room with another bowl of broth, several pieces of roasted meat and a strange assortment of bandages, leather strips and lengths of wood, hacked down to a thickness of a quarter of an inch.

"Are you sure you can do it?" Barry asked anxiously, as he untied the leather thongs on the door.

"My boy," the professor said touchily, "to a man who has performed cellular transformation operations, a splint should not be too difficult. If she will keep still I can patch that wing as good as new."

When they entered the room the girl watched them warily, but she showed no signs of fear. There were deep lines of pain in her face and beads of sweat ringed her forehead. A sickly white pallor was showing through the deep tan of her skin.

She drank the soup hungrily, without hesitation. But she would not touch the meat until Barry had eaten almost half of it. Then she devoured the rest.

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"We might have to put a splint on you," the professor said, "to show her that it's all right."

But two attempts to bind the injured wing convinced them that it was a hopeless task. The girl crouched in terror from them, shielding the broken wing with her body.

"What now?" the professor asked helplessly.

"I'll show you," Barry said grimly.

With a quick motion he grabbed the girl's arms, pinioning them behind her. She fought him in savage silence, but the surprise of his movement had given him the advantage. It took all of the steely strength in his arms to hold the girl while the professor straightened her broken wing.

"Hurry," Barry panted.

"Doing my best," the professor said through his teeth.

Barry held the girl, face downward on the floor, his knee in her back, but she continued to fight and struggle with savage strength.

The professor worked in swift silence. When he set the wing the girl strained convulsively for an instant, then her head fell forward to the floor.

"I think she's unconscious," Barry said.

"Good," the professor snapped. "I can work that much faster."

IN a matter of minutes he was binding the splints into place with leather thongs. Then he strapped the wing to the girl's body and stood up.

"All through," he said. "In a week or two it should be fit as a fiddle."

Barry turned the girl on her side and balled his jacket into a pillow and slipped it under her head.

Her eyes flickered open as they were leaving. The expression in them was inscrutable. There was pain and fear and watchfulness, but behind that there was a faint expression that was impossible to name.

Barry closed the heavy door and shook his head.

"It isn't likely," he said, "that we'll ever receive a vote of thanks for that job."

Professor Carstairs pursed his lips musingly.

"You never can tell," he said. "Stranger things have happened."

They started back down the rock hewn corridor toward the room which Barry had been using, but they had not traveled a dozen feet before they became aware of a sudden commotion, a clamorous excitement sweeping through the halls and corridors of the underground caves.

Hoarse guttural shouts echoed about them, and they saw a dozen of the shaggy cave brutes lumbering past an intersection, their faces twisted in savage anticipation.

The huge, dull-faced women crowded into the corridor from the living quarters, their monkey-like children clinging to their legs, squealing in excitement.

"What's up?" Barry demanded.

The professor shook his head worriedly.

"We'd better investigate," he answered.

They started off at a trot, but before they crossed the nearest intersection, four formidably armed cave men appeared and, with a wild yell, sprang at them.

The attack was so unexpected and the savagery of the shaggy creatures so irresistible that Barry was hurled to the ground before he could raise his arms to defend himself. Resistance was useless, but still he struggled desperately, lashing out with both fists at his bestial attackers.

A stunning blow from a heavy

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gnarled fist exploded a constellation of fireworks in his head. Dazed, he slumped to the floor, fighting doggedly at the mists of darkness that were rising to cloud his mind.

Rough hands jerked him to his feet and he felt himself being half dragged, half carried along the rocky floor of the corridor.

The very abruptness of the motion revived him to some extent. A dozen feet ahead he could see three burly figures dragging the limp form of Professor Carstairs between them. There was a babel of sound in his ears as the cave men grunted and chattered among themselves like a tribe of excited apes.

There was a triumphant, gloating note in their voices, as if some long and eagerly awaited event were about to transpire.

Groggily, Barry attempted to make some kind of sense out of the violent reversal of the cave men's attitude toward the professor and himself. It was no use. His tired brain gave up the struggle to think.

HOW long or how far he was dragged through narrow corridors, he had only the vaguest idea. It seemed hours and miles, but he was conscious enough to realize it had probably been only a fraction of that.

The forward motion stopped abruptly. Dimly he heard the shuffling, rhythmic tramp of heavy, bare feet approaching, coming nearer . . . nearer . . .

Exultant cries sounded about him and from a distance answering shouts filtered to his consciousness. Lifting his head Barry saw another and larger band of the savage cave creatures tramping toward them. Leading this horde was a gigantic figure of a man, muscled and massive, with a fantastically bestial countenance. This lumbering savage carried a club on one wide shoulder. In the forked end of the club a flashing, glittering stone was lashed, and its luminous emanations threw a pale flickering glow against the walls of the caves and over the dull faces of the pack.

Barry's eyes flicked from the giant leader of the approaching group, and a sudden shock of amazement jarred him to full consciousness. For in the center of the shaggy, savage pack of cave men, were three weary, dirt stained figures, stumbling along under the fierce prods of their captors.

Incredulously, he stared, his heart hammering painfully.

His eyes swung in an agony of apprehension to Professor Carstair's inert form, sprawled piteously on the rocky floor, then back to the advancing horde, to the small, dark haired girl, whose frail slimness was terribly emphasized by the towering bulk of the brutes who strode beside her.

"Linda!" he cried frantically.

At the sound of her name the girl looked up, and an expression of sudden hope and joy flooded her strained features.

"Barry," she whispered.

That faint sound went through him like a powerful elixir. With a sudden frenzied burst of strength he broke away from the hands that held him, and staggered toward her. Two shaggy creatures sprang after him, bellowing madly, but before they reached him, his inspired strength faded and he crashed forward to the hard floor.

CHAPTER VI

Waiting for Death

"THERE will be a full moon tonight!"

Professor Carstairs spoke the words

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slowly, with careful unmistakable emphasis. In the small dimly lighted chamber where he and Barry had been confined, they echoed with a fatalistic ring.

Barry lifted his head from his hands and looked up haggardly at the professor's slight figure.

"That means curtains for us then?" he asked.

"I'm quite certain of it," the professor answered. "You noticed the excitement in the face of the creature who brought us our food this morning? You hear the undercurrent of restless anticipation that drifts in to us? Very evil portents, both."

Barry stood up and savagely paced the narrow width of the cell.

"If only we knew what these beasts had done with Linda and McGregor and Allerton," he raged. "It's waiting here helplessly while she might be hurt, or in danger, that's driving me crazy."

"The others are safe until tonight," Professor Carstairs said heavily. "What might happen then is something I dare not let myself think about."

Barry slumped against the wall, gritting his teeth to hold back a groan. It was not his own life he regretted losing. It was the thought of Linda, frail and defenseless, going forth to a barbarous death, that brought red flecks of madness before his eyes. Since that brief moment, a week ago, when he had seen her, pitifully stumbling before the callous shouts of the brutish, gloating men, he had known that her fate was more important to him than his own. If, in dying, he could save her, he would consider it a light payment. But to go to death, futilely and uselessly, unable to raise a finger to help her, was maddening.

There was no way of measuring the passage of time in their dark damp dungeon. A faintly flickering torch in the corridor cast an oppressive, uncertain illumination through the chinks in the door of their cell. No other light reached them.

After an interminable stretch of time, the professor lifted his head. "Listen!" he said tensely.

A faint shout reached them and before it faded it was echoed by other voices, growing louder and closer. A tramping of feet that seemed to jar the solid rock floor came to them, and the eager howling voices swelled to an unbelievable crescendo as the mightily thudding feet neared.

Then, with a crash, the timbers of the door shattered and a half dozen shaggy demoniacal figures broke through and fell on them. Barry felt leather thongs cutting into his arms and wrists, then he was jerked into the corridor between two of the cave men.

A milling horde of the savages surrounded him and in the pale light their slavering fangs and unkempt hair gave them the appearance of lusting animals.

A hoarse sing-song chant broke out from them as they hustled him down the corridor. Then, hours and miles later it seemed, he was dragged through a crude arch way into the vast vaulted chamber that was the core of the volcano. Moonlight streaming through the hole hundreds of feet above his head, bathed with soft mellow light the incredible scene that confronted him.

THE large, naturally-formed arena was jammed with the shaggy men, the slovenly women and the shrieking children of the cave tribe. From wall to wall they formed a solid, screaming mass of primitive humanity. Flaring torches set in niches in the wall touched their glaring eyes with points of light and transformed them to glowing pools of insane frenzy.

On their hideously twisted faces was

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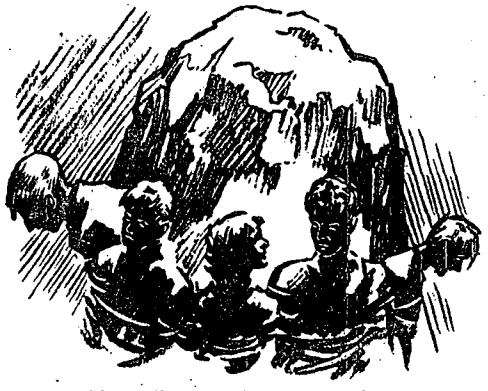
the stamp of mob lust, thirsting for vengeance, for sacrifice, for blood.

Barry tore his eyes from the terrible spectacle of these unclean savages caught in the turbulent stream of their own enraged passions. His gaze swung to the center of the arena, and cold film of perspiration broke on his face.

For, tied to an immense pillar, were the forms of Linda, McGregor and Allerton. McGregor's fiery red head was thrown back in rage, but Allerton was slumped limply against the column. He would have fallen if it hadn't been for the thongs that bound him to the pillar. Linda was standing calmly, her head high, but there was a desperate terror in her eyes.



They all awaited death as they stood there tied to the pillar

Barry took in the entire dreadful scene in one flickering instant, before he was shoved roughly through the howling mass of savages toward the sacrificial pillar.

Half stumbling, half falling, he almost lost consciousness as the maddened mob, incited by the vision of more victims, clawed at his face and clothes. Shrieking children were held high by foaming-mouthed mothers, to strike at his face and head with small fists, clenched around sharp rocks.

If it hadn't been for his escort he would have been torn to pieces before he had traveled a dozen feet. As it was, the mob was shoved away, the rows of bestially contorted faces falling aside like waves before the prow of a ship.

At last the nightmare passage was made and Barry was shoved against the pillar beside Linda. Heavy leather thongs were whipped about his shoulders and arms, the ends of the bonds were jerked tight through crude stone loops which had been chiselled into the pillar. In another few seconds the battered figure of the professor was hauled through the crowd and tied beside him.

The old man's white head slumped forward to his breast and his knees buckled, until only the pressure of the thongs kept him from falling.

The savage horde fell back from them then and squatted on the floor, their heads and eyes directed toward the shaft of moonlight that speared through the volcano opening, flooding the amphitheatre with its ghostly blue light.

From their throats poured a deafening, throbbing chant that filled the vast arena with its ominous volume. They seemed more like savage hounds baying at the mystery of the moon, than human creatures.

Barry twisted against his bonds until he could look down at Linda. His throat was tight as he saw the tiny smile she forced to her trembling lips.

"Will it be—swift?" she asked softly.

"I think so," he said.

There had been a thousand things in his mind to say to this girl but now they were gone. Or rather the necessity for saying them was gone. Somehow their silence seemed to be saying more than any words could.

"Boss!" It was McGregor's voice, cheerfully undismayed. "I didn't think I was going to see you again this side

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of creation. Things look dark, don't they? If I could get my hands free for a minute I'd show these howling apes a trick or two."

"Barry," Linda whispered, "will you please hold my hand? I don't want to be afraid."

Barry twisted until he could hold her small cold hand in his.

"You won't be," he said. "That's a promise."

"I hope my father doesn't regain consciousness," she said, a moment later. "If he goes—not knowing—it will be easier."

THEY talked then for a while. Barry told her how he had been brought to the place and of meeting her father. Against the background of the kneeling cave men and their savage, chilling chant, the tale lost its sense of unreality. Linda explained, aided by occasional profane comments from McGregor, how they had been attacked and captured by the marauding horde of savages and brought to their underground dwelling after a forced march through the almost impassible jungle.

Further conversation was made impossible then by a tremendous roar from the barbaric mob which ringed about them. Several dozen of the huge men had sprung to their feet and were hurrying to the archway through which Barry had been led. A wild commotion was raging at the entrance to the arena. The excitement communicated itself to the farthest corners of the hall, and almost as a single man, the kneeling horde rose to its feet, screaming maniacally.

Barry saw then the cause of the intense excitement. A small band of cave men had entered the arena, in their center was the slim dark-haired bird-girl. There was no fear in her lean haughty face, but her expressive eyes flashed vainly about the hall, like tiny birds flying at the bars of an invisible cage. Her arms were bound, and her great black wings hung at her side. Barry noticed that the wing which had been broken was still encased in the crude splint which the professor had applied.

The insane demonstration of the horde reached new heights as the slim figure of the bird-girl was shoved through their midst. Fierce, gnarled hands grabbed at the long silky wing feathers that flowed behind her, and, in some case, came away holding them clutched triumphantly.

The girl stared straight ahead, her head held high, her lustrous black hair streaming back to her shoulders. There was something scorning and disdainful in the proud set of her shoulders, the rigid arrogance of her bearing.

"She is magnificent!" Linda breathed.

The inner fringes of the mob split and the bird-girl was shoved roughly into the cleared space about the pillar. One of the guards lumbered to the column and began untying a bundle of leather braids that had been lashed to one of the stone loops, while the other kept his grip on the bird-girl's bound arms.

She was standing almost directly in front of Barry, and her dark inscrutable eyes settled on his with a fixed stare.

There was no expression on her features. They remained sternly and haughtily set, but there was a peculiar, questioning quality in the look she fixed on him.

Barry saw that her injured wing hung straight and clear from her side and that while the splint was crude and cumbersome, it shouldn't seriously affect her flying.

If she had the chance to fly. . . .

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The thought struck him and simultaneously he acted. The one idea in his mind was that if there was any chance of this creature escaping, any possibility of cheating the barbarous cave men of her torture and death, he wanted to give her that chance.

HIS legs weren't bound and the bird-girl's massive guard was standing within three feet of him. Flattening his back against the pillar for more leverage, he jerked his knee up and lashed out with his boot-shod foot. His swiftly traveling, powerfully driven foot caught the surprised guard in the pit of the stomach. With a wild yell of pain he clasped both hands to his belly and sank in agony to the floor.

For an instant the bird-girl stood rooted to the spot, staring stupidly at the writhing figure of the guard. A half dozen of the cave men were leaping for her, but still she remained motionless, her eyes swinging from the fallen guard to Barry. She looked at him an instant, her black eyes as unrevealing as ever; then, with a gloriously lithe and free motion, she leaped into the air. Her great wings spread mightily and beat like fluttering drums as she soared upwards.

Pandemonium raged in the jammed arena.

Barry twisted about and saw that the bird-girl was already a dozen feet above his head, circling upward with slow steady beats. Even at that distance it was apparent she was favoring her injured wing, for she was veering slightly to the right with each wing stroke.

Roaring with rage, a dozen of the cave men hurled their stone axes at the slowly ascending figure of the bird-girl. Barry held his breath as the missiles flashed past her miraculously missing their mark.

"Oh God!" he cried. "Let her make it!"

If it wasn't for the girl's weakened wing she would have been out of range by then, but she was forced to fly painfully and slowly, gaining only a few feet with each laborious circling of the arena.

The guard whom Barry had kicked crawled sluggishly to his feet, his bestial face contorted with rage. Barry was gazing upward at the desperately laboring girl, when something like a sledge hammer crashed into the side of his face. His head snapped back against the stone pillar with a sickening crunch, and the last thing he heard was Linda's scream. . . .

WHEN he opened his eyes again his head was throbbing painfully, but he saw that the assembled tribe of cave men were again on their haunches, their eyes fixed in mystic concentration on the bright shaft of moonlight that streamed through the opening of the volcano.

Linda's hand squeezed his warmly.

"Are you all right?" she whispered.

"I seem to be," he said groggily. "What hit me?"

"The brute you kicked," Linda said angrily. "He struck you when you weren't looking."

Barry grinned bitterly and spat the salty blood from his mouth. Linda's fingers tightened on his hand again.

"Barry," she whispered, "she made it!"

CHAPTER VII

Thor's Mighty Hammer

"FINE," Barry said grimly. "How long have I been out?"

"About an hour, I think," Linda said. "You have a nasty bump on the

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back of your head. It hurt me just to look at it."

Barry swung his eyes over the arena. The hundreds of savages who filled the place from wall to wall, were waiting in ominous, expectant silence. Their eyes were riveted to the small opening at the apex of the vaulted ceiling, and gleaming with unholy fervor. The only sound was that of their hoarse breathing. Barry saw then that the shaft of moonlight struck the ground about twenty feet from the pillar to which they were bound, and it was moving inexorably toward them. They were directly under the opening through which the moonlight poured, and in a short while the moon would pass directly overhead. Then the shaft of light would strike them directly, bathing them completely in its calm soft radiance.

Barry realized then for what the crouching savages were waiting. They were waiting for the inevitable rotation of the moon to point its finger of light at the victims bound to the sacrificial pillar.

When that happened the crouching cave men would slake their blood thirst. Glancing down at his feet, Barry repressed an involuntary shiver as he noticed faded rusty stains at the foot of the column. Only, he knew, they weren't rust stains.

Linda looked up at him and smiled faintly.

"In fifteen minutes it will be over," she said softly. Her eyes turned involuntarily to the shaft of brilliant light, creeping closer and closer, then she looked back at him. "I understand," she said quietly.

Barry felt thankful that she had guessed why the cave men were waiting. He wouldn't liked having to tell her.

He heard a faint sobbing sound then and, twisting about, he saw that Allerton was regaining consciousness. The man's big body seemed somehow shrunken. His face was pallid and the strands of wheat colored hair that fell over his forehead was dark with perspiration. There was a furtive, fearful light in his eye as his gaze flicked over the watching, waiting cave men.

"I don't want to die," he whispered hoarsely. That was all he said, but every shuddering breath he drew was like a moan.

"If you start blubbering," McGregor said with terrible earnestness, "I'll get my hands loose if it's the last thing I do and choke you till your tongue hangs down your shirt front. Remember that!"

The imperceptibly advancing shaft of moonlight was now only five feet from the pillar and Barry noticed a sudden stir in the silent ranks of the cave men.

THE huge, tremendously muscled brute who had led the party, which had captured Linda and McGregor, was striding through the crouching ranks of the cave men and on his shoulder he carried the brilliantly flashing stone that was lashed into the forked end of his club.

A murmur rippled through the tensely watching savages as this impressive creature shoved his way through them and advanced to the base of the pillar to which the victims were tied.

Barry saw with a quick glance that the fatal shaft of light was already touching one side of the pillar, spreading its illumination over McGregor and Allerton. In a few minutes it would completely bathe them with its deadly brilliance.

The huge savage shouted a stream of unintelligible sounds, his coarse fea-

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tures working insanely, the terrible light in his small, close-set eyes gleaming with the lustful fever for blood.

He leaped from one foot to the other in a wild dance that was hideous in its suggestion of bestial emotion and raw savagery, continuing at the time, to scream his wild words into the night. Swinging the glittering stone about his head he hopped in and out of the shaft of moonlight, bellowing in a mad ecstasy when the radiant light touched him, and whining in a dreadful monotone when his leaps carried him into the darkness again.

Then raising the club high above his head he dashed it to the ground at their feet. Instantly a crescendoing detonation split the air and a brilliant bolt of light flashed up from the earth, searing their faces with its blinding heat.

With a wild cry the cave savage hurled himself to the ground, grabbed the glittering hammer and scrambled to his feet again.

Once again the nightmarish dance began, the whirling club gleaming with a thousand refracted lights as it spun crazily about the head of the impassioned dancer.

A steadily growing chant was rising from the tensely watching tribe. Their eyes were like tiny sparks of hell-fire in the darkness, and their whitely gleaming teeth crunched and champed as the hoarse mouthings of their dancer rose to new heights of frenzy.

Barry held Linda's hand tightly.

"Chin up," he said quietly. "It will soon be over."

The feverishly mad gyrations of the dancing savage were reaching a climax. The shaft of moonlight was inevitably spreading over the pillar. Now all but a tiny portion of the blood altar was gleaming palely under its mellow luminescence.

With a last mighty scream, so terrible that Barry felt Linda's hand tremble in his own, the dancer jerked himself erect, every muscle tautened, the gleaming hammer held high above his head.

His glaring eyes fixed on them with the frightfulness of a madman's stare and the muscles of his brutish face froze in a horrible expression of demoniacal violence.

Then the shaft of brilliant moonlight shifted its last inevitable fractional inch—and the pillar of sacrifice with its five human victims was completely covered with the radiant beam of the moon.

The horde of cave people surged forward, their savage faces disfigured by their consuming emotions, and a gloating roar swept upward from their throats.

Their barbaric high priest raised himself on his toes and lifted the hammer of death high above his head.

BARRY instinctively tensed himself for the shattering death he knew was coming. His fingers gripped Linda's hand in a last mute farewell.

Then, with startling suddenness, the moonlight was blacked out and the arena was plunged into abysmal darkness. The transition from gleaming light to deep blackness came so swiftly and so unexpectedly that an incredulous murmur drifted up from the thronged hall.

One instant the small band of victims had been glaringly revealed in the full light of the moon—the next they were as invisible as if a mantel of black velvet had been thrown over them.

Then a few flickering strands of light trailed into the arena, but simultaneously the air was rent with the sudden sound of mightily throbbing wings!

A sudden exultation swept through Barry as he saw dozens of the slim

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streaking bird-girls, gleaming swords in hand, flash through the shaft of moonlight and dive with incredible savagery at the bewildered mass of cave men.

Instantly he realized that the blackout had been caused by their wings as they drifted into the core of the volcano. Then, as they plummeted into the arena, the moonlight broke through their beating wings, throwing grotesque effects of light and shadow against the floors and walls of the amphitheatre.

A bedlam of noise and terrified confusion raged about them, as the first ranks of the bird-girls dove into the packed jam of cave men, their gleaming, viciously curved swords slashing savagely, relentlessly, irresistibly.

The guttering torches on the wall cast an eerie illumination over the incredible scene. As the surprise of the bird-girls' devastating attack waned, the cave men began to fight back, fighting barbarously, desperately for their very lives.

Their stone axes and blunt clubs crashed into the attacker's whistling swords and the sound was like the roar of thunder. Many of the bird-girls fell, crippled by savagely thrown axes or clubs, but even as they fell they drove the points of their curved swords into the packed mass of cave men beneath them.

Their ferocity was unbelievable. With unceasing savagery they dove into the ranks of the cave people, slashing, stabbing, hacking and harrying. Like the mythical harpies they gave no quarter or rest, but increased the ruthlessness of their attack with every second.

From the formation of the bird-girls, a figure suddenly detached itself, wheeled in a circle and dropped to the ground next to Barry. It was the girl whom he had fed, whose wing he had set and to whom he had given liberty.

There was no expression on her lean savage features as she slashed away the bonds that held him. When he was free she regarded him for an instant, her black eyes still inscrutable and unrevealing, then she wheeled and sprang into the air.

Within ten feet her great right wing folded and she fell to the ground. Her eyes were still savage and unafraid as she met her death at the hand of a shaggy brute, who died himself an instant later as a flashing sword plunged home to his heart.

With his lips set stiffly, Barry untied Linda, then McGregor. When he turned to the professor he found that the old man's eyes were open.

He struck his bonds from him in a few seconds, but when he turned he saw that Allerton had slumped to the ground, out cold.

He spun and saw that the relentless onslaught of the bird-girls had driven the cave men toward the entrance of the arena. Some were still fighting back but the large body of them had fled to the security of the corridors and caves where they could not be followed.

The professor's hand was suddenly on his arm.

"Barry," he spoke swiftly, "there's a side entrance from this hall that leads to the jungle. Follow me."

McGregor had already slung Allerton's limp form over his broad shoulders.

"Okay," Barry snapped. "Lead on."

He grabbed two of the bird-girls weapons from the floor and taking Linda by the arm strode after the professor and McGregor. . . .

BARRY broke the trail through the jungle, using the curved sword as a jungle knife to hack a path through the thick rope-thick trailers and underbrush. Linda followed him, then the professor and Allerton, who had come

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around shortly after they left the arena, with McGregor bringing up the rear.

It was a tense silent party. Two hours in the black brooding jungle was enough to try the toughest nerves, but their desperate anxiety was not the prowling carnivora, but the two-legged beasts who trailed them.

Suddenly Barry stopped and swung around.

"Don't make a sound," he whispered.

For a moment the jungle silence enveloped them, oppressive and evil.

Then, far to their rear, they heard the sudden shrill shriek of a frightened bird.

"They're still following," McGregor muttered.

"They'll follow until they get us," Barry said grimly. "They're gaining steadily. They're following our trail which makes it easier for them."

He turned to Linda and the professor.

"I told you once I'd expect obedience on this trip. I want you two to go on ahead. McGregor and I will drop back and fight a rear guard, delaying action. It's the only chance of any of us getting through this thing."

"But, Barry," Linda protested, "You—"

"No arguments," he said quietly. "You'll have to do as you're told."

"What about me?" Allerton said uneasily.

Barry's jaw hardened fleetingly. Then he shrugged.

"You go on with Linda and her father. They'll need protection."

McGregor snorted disdainfully.

"Fine lot of protection he'd—"

"Mac!" Barry snapped. "That's all of that. No more talk now."

Linda looked at him for an instant, tears in her eyes, then she turned and followed Allerton and her father. Soon the jungle swallowed all but the faint noise of their passage.

"Swell spot for us," McGregor grumbled.

Barry grinned. "I know you better than that, Mac," he said. "You love this and don't try and deny it."

"Well, what's our program?" McGregor asked.

Barry explained. "I don't believe there's a large band following us. Not enough noise. Possibly there are only two or three able to travel. We'll ambush them as they pass by us. They won't be expecting a battle and we'll have the advantage of surprise."

"Sounds kind of interesting," the big Scotchman said grimly. "I'm anxious to get a decent crack at these apes."

Without any more talk they concealed themselves in the dense underbrush that lined the path they had made. Barry's hands tightened on the handle of the sword he carried. McGregor was similarly armed, but such weapons might be pitifully ineffective against the brute strength and animal cunning of the cave men they were to attack.

They did not have long to wait. Within fifteen minutes the normal noises of the jungle faded away and soon they heard the tramp of feet and the rustle of great bodies against the jungle foliage.

Peering through the screen of underbrush Barry soon saw the figures of three of the Cor-Magnon creatures padding along the trail. In the lead was the giant brute who carried the blazing stone in his club. Barry felt a chill of premonition as he saw this gleaming weapon resting on the shoulder of the massive leader.

In the moonlight he could see the smooth play of mighty muscles and see the rise and fall of cavernous chests, and he could see the expressions of vindictive rage and lust that were

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stamped on the coarse thick features of the cave men.

His jaw hardened grimly. Linda's life might depend on what happened in the next few moments.

THEN the moments of cramped waiting were over. The swiftly striding cave men were within six feet of them now and in an instant they would pass between them.

Barry took a death grip on the haft of his sword and then the muscles of his legs uncoiled like powerful steel hurling him at the massive leader.

The advantage of surprise was his, and it was a decisive one. His slashing sword, in one blow, nearly decapitated the massive creature who carried the exploding stone weapon.

Almost without a sound the leader of the small group staggered back, blood pouring from his neck. He pitched to the ground and the weapon he carried exploded with a blinding flash as it struck the hard earth.

Spinning quickly he saw that McGregor had had the same success with the creature he had attacked. But the third and surviving member of the horde was already leaping at Barry, face twisted in terrible rage, his massive club swinging in a powerful arc.

Barry sprang back, but a trailing vine caught his heel and slammed him to the ground as the cave man leaped forward.

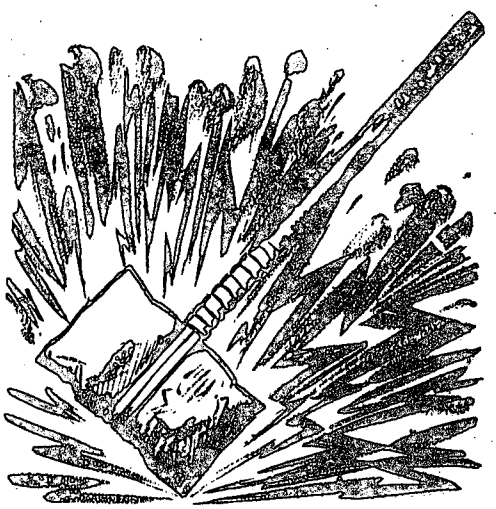
The club was descending in a mighty circle when McGregor sprang at the savage. The blow, intended for Barry, caught him on the side of the head with a sickening wet *crunch*.

Barry was on his feet before the snarling cave man could wield the club again. He dodged a devastating swipe, then stepped in swiftly, his sword plunging home with a savage thrust that froze an expression of amazed agony on the bestial features of the massive cave creature.

Before the man sprawled to the ground, Barry was at McGregor's side, holding his head in his arms. The red of his hair was stained with a deeper red, and his face was pinched with pain.

But he smiled, faintly, weakly, but still a smile.

"I always had the hardest head," he gasped. "That—blow would have knocked you cold, but—it didn't hurt me a bit."



The weapon exploded with a blinding flash as it struck the earth

"Sure, sure," Barry said softly. "You're okay."

"No I'm not," the big Scotchman said painfully. "I wouldn't lie to you Barry, you know that. I'm done in."

"Don't be a fool," Barry said desperately. "We're only a mile or so from the professor's time-ship. He gave me the location. I can get you there in no time."

McGregor gripped his arm.

"Can't go to the professor's ship," he gasped. "Listen to me Barry. Somethin' funny there. Meant to tell you before now."

"Don't try and talk," Barry said

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softly. It was all he could do to keep his voice even, for he knew that the big Scotchman was on his last safari.

"Gotta talk," McGregor gasped stubbornly. "The professor's time-ship hasn't enough entropy juice to make a return trip. Only had enough to get here. Not enough to take it back. Some damn fool drained the tank of return trip fuel. Don't go there. Head for our ship. It's the only way you can get back. Sorry I can't go back with you Barry."

The big hand on Barry's arm tightened for an instant, then fell away. Barry looked down into his friend's peaceful, still smiling face, and a single sob shook his shoulders.

For a long moment he knelt there silently, then he rose to his feet. The gleaming, fiery stone weapon was a bright glow against the darkness of the ground. He picked it up gingerly, careful to handle it by the wooden club end, then he checked his compass and without a backward glance struck off into the jungle. . . .

SPEED . . . Speed . . . Speed. The single word seemed burned in his brain as he plowed frantically through the clinging underbrush.

McGregor's dying revelation acted as a whip lashing him on and on and on.

. . . . *Not enough entropy juice to take the ship back . . .*

Then Linda's words:

. . . *Father left the last check-up to Bruce . . .*

It was all so suddenly and terribly clear. Allerton, driven by greed and a desire to dominate completely the company he and the professor had formed, had obviously decided to eliminate the old man by marooning him in time. Entrusted with the job of checking over the professor's ship, he had deliberately drained an entropy tank, consigning the professor and his companion, to a one way ticket to oblivion. Now, he was alone with Linda and her father, heading surely for the large ship, which he would know was the only one able to make the return trip. Unsuspecting, the professor and Linda too, were in the gravest danger.

Speed . . . Speed . . . Speed.

The word burned into his brain.

Sobbing for breath, he fought desperately through the dense undergrowth, hacking like a madman at the trailers and vines that entangled him. An eternity passed. . . .

It was another hour before he reached the clearing where they had originally landed. With a prayer of thankfulness he saw the slender shimmering shape of the time-ship through the darkness of the night. There still might be time.

Then he heard the shout. It was a thin wavering cry of angry helplessness.

Staggering with weariness he broke into the clearing and by the pale illumination of the moon he saw two figures locked in fierce combat alongside the ship.

Even in that light he recognized Bruce Allerton and Professor Carstairs. The professor was hanging desperately to Allerton, but with an oath, the larger man swung the professor's slight figure from him and struck him heavily in the face. The professor fell awkwardly to the ground and did not rise.

Allerton wheeled then, as if warned by a sixth sense, and faced Barry. The wheat colored hair hung in his blazing eyes and his chest rose and fell heavily with every gasp.

"You!" he snarled. There was a black hate and bitterness in the way he ground out the word. "You won't stop me. No one will!"

With an inarticulate bellow he sprang at Barry.

Barry's exhausted body rose to meet

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this final test. He lifted the brilliantly gleaming stone weapon he was still holding and swung it at Allerton's charging figure. But he overestimated his strength.

The club slipped futilely from his nerveless, limp fingers and dropped to the ground. Oddly, the handle jammed in a crevice in the earth, and the club head of flashing stone did not touch the ground.

Allerton slewed to a stop, a gloating smile on his face.

"Thanks for the weapon," he said mockingly.

He bent swiftly and grabbed the hammer by the head.

It was the last thing he ever did. The roaring explosion lifted him off his feet and hurled him backwards a dozen feet through the air. When his eyes cleared after the blinding detonation, and the acrid smoke settled, Barry stumbled to the professor's prone figure. With the last of his waning strength he lifted him in his arms and carried him into the time-ship.

Linda was stretched out on a cot and there was a small bruise above her temple, but she was breathing evenly.

The professor opened his eyes as Barry eased him into a chair.

"Your arrival was most opportune," he said heavily. "That fiend planned to leave us here and take Linda back with him. My boy, you have more than saved my life. You have saved everything in life that is dear to me."

Barry looked at Linda's pale lovely features and smiled.

"Maybe I had a selfish motive," he said.

The professor regarded him for an instant and there was a hint of the customary twinkle in his keen blue eyes. He nodded his head slowly. "I see," he said, "I see."

Linda stirred slightly then and Barry dropped to his knees beside the cot. When she opened her eyes he was smiling. "Everything is all right," he whispered. "Don't try to speak now."

The professor set the controls and mechanism for the return trip, but before he made the final adjustment, Barry swung around to him. "Aren't you forgetting something?" he asked.

The professor looked at him blankly. "No. Why?"

"What about your mission here?"

"Oh!" the professor nodded, "You refer to my search for the hammer of Thor—the hammer weapon of the cave people is the legendary hammer."

"Well," Barry said, "aren't you going to take it back with you?"

"Oh that won't be necessary," the professor was absorbedly tinkering with the intricate mechanism of the ship. "You see, there was no problem of synthetic energy in the action of the explosive hammer. It was simply a highly magnetized rock which released an electrical charge when grounded. That ended my interest in the matter. I have another problem facing me now. It has to do with the entropy zone movement of time travel. I must get back and get to work on it."

A frown settled over his forehead as he leaned nearer the control board of the ship. It was obvious that he had forgotten everything else.

Linda squeezed Barry's hand.

"Do you think," she said, "that you can stand a research scientist for a father-in-law?"

Barry looked down at her solemnly. "It's a lot to ask," he said, "but you almost balance things up. Notice I say 'almost'."

He slipped his arm about her shoulders as the professor engaged the master switch. "We're on our way," he said quietly.

"Together," she whispered.

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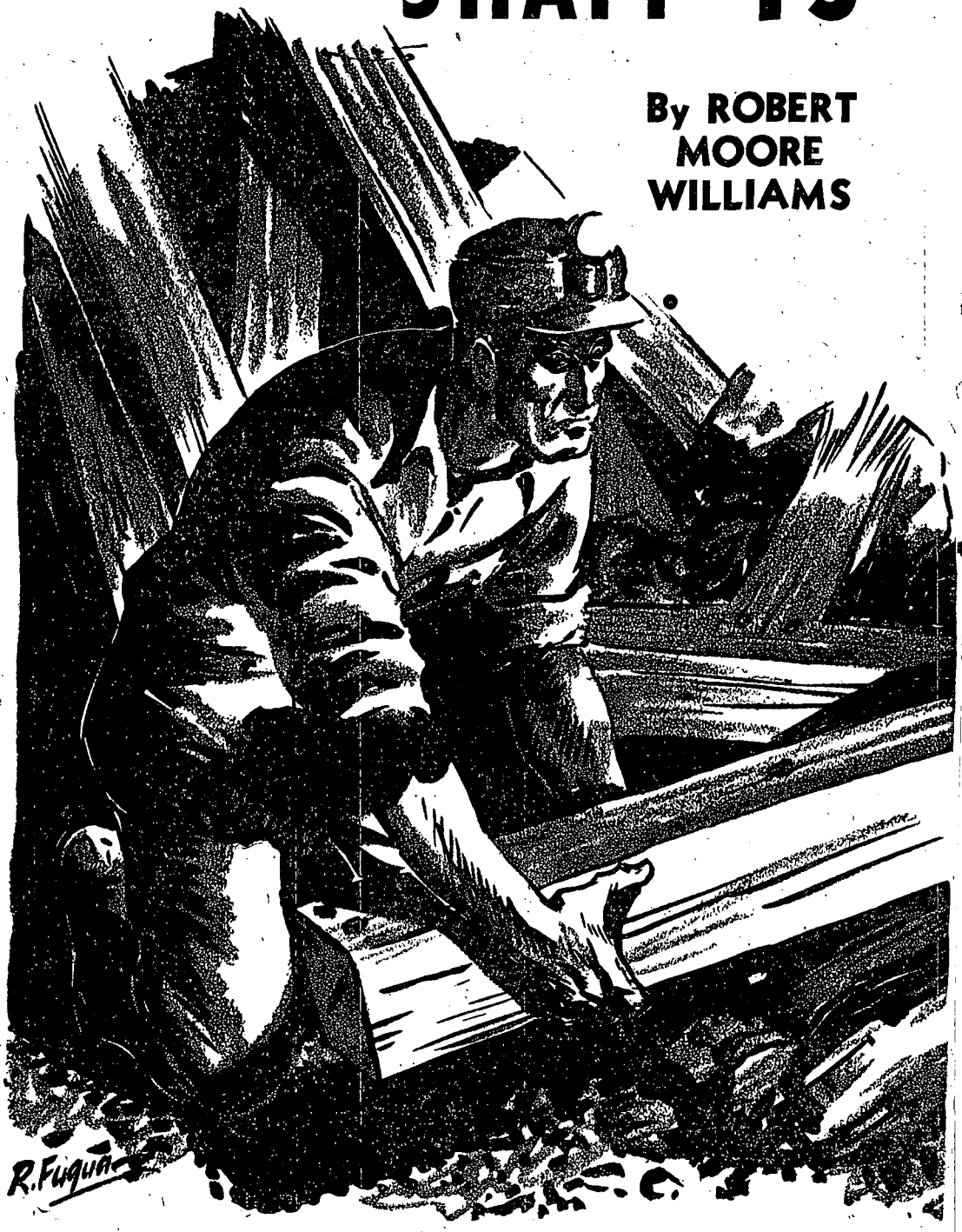
The MYSTERY OF SHAFT 13

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



The beam was heavy, and hard to move

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"AT'S the way she stands," Mine Boss Billy Patterson said. His shoulders came up in a defiant shrug for which his waving hands apologized. Clad in dirty overalls, his cap thrust far back on his head, he stood before the superintendent's desk. "The boys wanted I should tell you she stands that way," he ended, his hands and his tone both apologizing for his defiance. Or for his fear.

Dave Wade, superintendent of the mines operated by the Kentucky Consolidated Mining Company, was not certain what the mine boss was apologizing for. He saw the defiance in the man and he sensed the fear. But he knew this mine boss. The man was not scared of anything that walked the earth. Men who dig for their living underground don't scare easily. But this man was scared. Wade leaned back in his chair and the springs creaked protestingly at the bulk of bone and muscle they were supporting. His lean youthful face was thoughtful. He studied the man before him.

The mine boss shifted his weight to the other foot. "It ain't that we don't want to work her," he said. "By granny, she's a good vein, as good as I ever stuck a pick into. She works mighty easy too, and I ain't sniffed any gas. There's nothing wrong with her, ex-

There were two cuts to shaft 13, connected at only one end. Yet the same man was in both cuts. Could he walk through the earth?

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cept—" His voice rumbled into mutterings deep in his throat.

"Except you're scared," Dave Wade said.

"I ain't scared," the boss protested quickly. "It's the boys who are scared." He looked at Wade, and meeting an unfaltering gaze, his eyes dropped.

"All right," Wade said. "Get yourself a new crew and continue operations."

"You mean—go ahead?"

"Of course. We need that coal."

The mine boss looked at the floor. "You mean I should fire the boys and hire a whole new crew?"

"Not at all. Transfer them to the other shafts and get your new crew from the other mines the company operates. Nobody gets fired around here, without cause."

The boss seemed a little relieved. "The boys would be glad to get transferred to some other shaft," he said. "Maybe I better go with 'em." He looked quickly at the superintendent.

"Maybe you better not," Wade said. "You know this thirteenth shaft—the new one. If we brought in a new boss, he'd waste a lot of time learning what you already know. You can get yourself another crew but you stay where you are. We need you there."

The boss began to sweat. "I ain't been feeling so good lately," he said. "I think maybe I ought to lay-off for a week or two. Do me good. I'm kind of down in my back."

"Bad back, eh?" said Wade. "Have you seen the doctor?"

"No. I ain't had time. I just been so busy I ain't had time. I better go see him today, I expect. It'll be all right, won't it, if I lay-off for a few days?"

WADE hated to push a man like this but he wanted to know how far this mine boss would go. He shook his head. "No lay-off now," he said. "We're too busy to spare you."

"I feel terrible," the boss said promptly. He put his hand on the small of his back and groaned. "Sometimes a pain hits me here so I can't hardly stand up. I ain't really fit to boss a gang."

"You're going to boss one," Wade said. "You're going to boss the new crew for this shaft we've just opened."

The mine boss looked appealingly at his superintendent. He met a cold, steely stare. His gaze faltered. Globules of sweat began to glisten on his forehead.

"I guess I better turn in my time," he said desperately. "I guess I better quit."

Wade's chair came forward with a creak and a groan. "You'll quit your job before you'll go back into this new shaft?" he demanded.

"I guess I better," the boss answered. He was sweating freely now. "I feel terrible. I ain't fit to work, Mr. Wade. I just ain't."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Wade said. He knew what a job meant here, especially the job of mine boss. The miners didn't quit such jobs because of an idle whim. They had to have a reason for quitting, a damned good reason. Yet this man was trying to quit.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Wade said.

"You mean you'll let me transfer to some other shaft?" There was no mistaking the eagerness in the voice.

"No. I don't mean that, either. You can lay-off for a day or two."

"But—but this new shaft—shaft number thirteen? What about it?"

"I'm going to take care of that myself," Wade answered. "Go back and tell the boys to take the rest of the day off."

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Looking only a little relieved, the mine boss went out. Wade stared thoughtfully at the door as it closed behind the retreating man. There was a worried frown on his face.

He was superintendent of these mines, responsible to the stockholders for their profitable operation. Without the new shaft, the balance sheet would maybe show a profit for the year, and maybe not. With it in operation, there would be a nice dividend. But if the men refused to work it, it sure as hell wouldn't be in operation. Coal wouldn't dig itself. It had to be dug.

He picked up the telephone. To the operator, he said, "Get Jerry for me."

Jerry Moss was the company geologist, a spare withered little man whom Dave Wade had known since childhood. He knew he could trust Jerry. More than that, he knew he could rely on the geologist. The phone clicked. A voice came over the wire.

"Jerry," Wade said, "if you're not too busy, I'd like to have you drop over to my office. Yes, right away."

"Okay, Dave. But what's on your mind?"

"I want you," Wade said over the phone, "to help me lay a ghost."

There was a moment of silence, then startled profanity came over the wire. "What the hell, Dave? Are you kidding me?"

"I was never more serious in my life," Dave Wade said. "Get on over here. We've got a job on our hands."

"IT'S like this," Wade said. "We opened up a new vein on one of our properties, sunk a shaft—shaft number thirteen on your records—and started operations. We started producing coal and everything looked fine. Then I got a request from one of the men for a transfer. He said this new shaft was too far from his home and it would be easier if he could work in another shaft. This was strictly regular and I approved the transfer. The next day I got a request for a lay-off from a man who said he was sick. Okay, I told him he could lay-off. The next day, Billy Patterson, the mine boss, reported that two men had quit and he didn't seem any too happy himself. I didn't think anything of it, but told him to replace the men. Today he came back and said the whole force was quitting."

Jerry Moss had keen, twinkling eyes that looked out upon the world as if their owner were constantly surprised by the things he saw. There was a fringe of gray hair around his forehead. He listened quietly.

"I demanded to know what was wrong," Wade continued. "After hemming and hawing, he told me the mine was haunted."

Wade stopped, watching the geologist to note his reaction.

"It seems an odd place for a ghost," Jerry Moss said.

In spite of himself, Wade's mouth fell open. "What—what's that?"

"You usually find them around old houses and ancient castles and places like that. Ghosts, I mean." Moss shook his head. "Never heard of a ghost in a coal mine before."

"Look here," said Wade. "If you're trying to humor me because you think I've suddenly gone insane—"

"Not at all," Moss interrupted. "You're no crazier than anybody else. I merely mentioned that a coal mine seemed an odd place for a ghost. What does it look like?"

"I'm no crazier than anybody else! Listen, Jerry—"

"Everybody is more or less crazy. What does the ghost look like?"

"I don't know," Wade said bitterly. "After all, I haven't seen it."

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"Don't be that way," the geologist said. "What did Billy Patterson say it looked like?"

"He didn't say. He wouldn't even admit he had seen it. Said the boys kept coming to him and telling him there was a spook in the mine."

"Um," said Moss thoughtfully. "Do you believe them?"

"Do I believe them what?"

"Do you believe they saw a ghost?"

"How do I know what they saw?"

"I didn't ask you if you knew what they saw. I asked you what you believed."

WADE stared fretfully at the geologist. He was younger than Moss, bigger, and there was more of the tiger about him. A man had to be part tiger to be mining superintendent in this country. Wade was no fool. He had been graduated, with honors, from a mining school and had added the experience of fifteen hard years to the theory the school had taught him.

"I don't know what to believe," he said finally. "But I know this much: Billy Patterson wouldn't go back in that mine if I offered him the vein. Hell, Jerry, if a man like Billy Patterson is scared to go down in a shaft, I don't know what to think."

"Billy's not very smart," Moss offered, his keen eyes on the superintendent. "He's just an ignorant, superstitious miner."

"Billy's never had much formal education but he's had a lot of experience," Wade said stiffly. "What the hell's come over you, Jerry? You know Billy Patterson. I never thought I'd hear you call him an ignorant, superstitious miner."

Moss grinned, then instantly sobered. "So you do believe the men saw something!"

Wade was relieved at the sight of the grin. "Well—" He shrugged. "For a minute you had me going."

"I was only trying to find out what you really thought," the geologist apologized. "On a subject such as this, you, and everybody else who has any sense, will try to evade the issue, for the obvious reason that only ignorant, superstitious people believe in ghosts and you don't want to put yourself in that classification."

"Sir Oliver Lodge and Arthur Conan Doyle could scarcely be called ignorant."

"I didn't say that."

"I've known you twenty-five years," Wade continued thoughtfully. "I've never heard you talk like this before."

"The subject never came up before," Moss answered. "I'm not trying to convince you of anything. I'm only saying that, in my opinion, the subject of ghosts ought to be left open until more complete and more accurate data has been assembled for study and classification. Which brings us back to the reason you asked me to come to your office. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go with me," Wade said. "Our private beliefs aside, we have to face this set of facts: There is a rich coal vein which my men won't work because something scares them away. It's my job to see that the vein is either worked or to have a damned good reason for not working it. Therefore I have to find out what is scaring my men and eliminate it. If it's all superstitious fol-de-rol, the fact that I am willing to enter the mine and spend several hours there, will shame the men into going back to work. If something is really in the mine—" He reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a revolver. "I'm not ordering you to go," he said to Moss. "But, Jerry,

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I'd sure like to have you along."

"Got another gun?" said Moss. "I'll go."

THE Consolidated's office was a plain, frame building. The two men stepped out of it, both pausing automatically, their eyes going over the scene that lay before them. Coal. It was everywhere. Set in this narrow valley were the loading tipples of nine different mining companies. Black gold was coming out of the earth in a stream that flowed through nine different spigots. Here, there, everywhere, flapping conveyor belts were hoisting coal into loading bins. Dumpy freight engines were methodically shoving empty cars under the bins and the coal was thundering down. Shove an empty under the hopper. Pause and let her fill up. Shove another empty under the hopper. The rhythm kept up all day. And all night.

Long lines of filled cars groaned out of the valley, moving off toward the mysterious world outside, the world that had a ravenous and seemingly unsatisfiable appetite for this black stuff. It was dug out of the earth here, among many other places, and was sent out. Some of it went to heat houses in the cold north, some of it went to shove trains across the continent. Some of it went into coking ovens and eventually released its energy in furnaces so bright they seemed to rival the light of the sun from which this energy had come in the long ago. Some of it went into medicines, some into dyes, some of it appeared on shapely feminine limbs. The chemists took this black stuff and worked miracles with it. There was almost everything in coal. Life-giving medicines and subtle poisons. Wars were fought over it and nations grew strong or weak as they possessed it in plenitude.

Long ago, ages ago, it had been stored here. Before the hills came, it was here. It had waited here for uncounted ages. Now a race used it to rise to greatness.

Neither of the two men again mentioned the purpose of their journey. They went in a company car, Wade driving. He was a skillful, careful driver.

THE mine was dark. It was new, and the exact extent of the vein was not yet known. In consequence, electric lights had not yet been strung. The two men used carbide lights.

"The drift splits in a V here," Wade said.

"I suppose," Moss answered. "Our first step is to make certain no one is down here."

"The watchman on top told us that."

"Yes, but he might have been mistaken. If there is anyone down here, we want to know it. I don't at all fancy having someone coming walking up on me out of the darkness. Shall we make the search together or shall we split up and each take one prong of the V?"

Wade hesitated. He wanted to know if there was anyone down in the mine beside themselves and the only way to find out would be to make a search. He started to say he preferred they stay together but he realized this might be interpreted as fear. He wasn't afraid. He really wasn't. His main purpose in coming here was to prove to the miners that there was nothing to be afraid of.

"It will be faster if we split up," he decided. "You take the left prong of the V and I'll take the right. The drifts haven't been extended more than about two hundred yards as yet, so it won't take long to search them. We'll meet back here."

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Moss acquiesced. He moved off into the darkness, his light throwing fretting shadows against the dark walls of the tunnel. Wade watched him go, then turned and walked down the right prong of the V. He went clear to the end of the drift, finding no one. Water dripped from the walls, collecting in little pools on the floor. His light chased away the darkness. There was no one.

At the end of the tunnel he found where the men had been working. Tools were scattered around, picks, shovels, drills. The air hammer was lying in a puddle of water. He frowned at that. This was no way to treat company property. He set the air hammer on a ledge, wondering why the shift boss had permitted a crew to leave it that way. Not until then did he realize that these tools had been abandoned. They had been allowed to remain where they happened to fall.

The realization sent a tiny chill prickling up his spine. Men had been working here and had suddenly quit working. They had dropped their tools and had run. Something had happened. The evidence of it was here in these tools lying on the floor of the drift. The miners hadn't even finished filling the car they had been loading.

Those tools, that unfilled car—he got a grip on himself, and started back, dodging around the mine props that supported the roof. Once, in the far distance, he thought he heard a thud. He listened, but the sound did not come again, and he decided it had been a blast set off in some other mine. Such a sound would carry a long distance through rock.

He went back toward the V. Wade was an intelligent man. He kept an open mind, or tried to. But he kept thinking about the way the tools had been left when the miners cleared out and he was glad when he saw Jerry's light up ahead of him. Jerry had had the shorter prong to investigate and had already returned to the appointed meeting place.

"Did you find anyone?" the geologist asked.

Wade shook his head. He said nothing about the tools however. Better wait until later about that. He might be mistaken in assuming the tools had been abandoned. "Do you find anything?" he asked.

"No. But the men must have left in a hurry, I thought. They didn't wait to take their tools with them."

So the men in the other heading had run too. Well. "Hm. Screwy business," Wade said. "Wonder what scared them?"

"I imagine we would be surprised, if we really knew," Moss answered. "What comes next on the program?"

WADE thought about that. He had no definite plan. If there was any good reason why this vein should not be worked, such as danger from a falling roof, or gas, he wanted to know about it. He wouldn't send men into a dangerous mine. On the other hand, if the mine wasn't dangerous, he wanted it worked. He hadn't seen anything dangerous.

"I guess we'll just sit down and wait," he said. "If the men really think the mine is haunted, we'll have to spend several hours here to convince them there is no reason to be scared. If we leave too quickly, they may think we've been scared out too."

"How will they know whether we've been scared out or not?"

"Oh, the watchman up above will be waiting for us. He'll pass the word along as to how much time we spent down here. And I wouldn't be surprised if we find Billy Patterson wait-

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ing for us when we go out. He'll want to know what we find and he won't be easy to fool."

Wade sat down. He fished his pipe out of his pocket and methodically filled it. There was comfort in tobacco. He struck a match and watched to see if his fingers were shaking. They weren't.

Jerry Moss leaned against the wall.

"I wonder how big a pair of fools we really are, sitting down here waiting for something to happen."

"It's hard to know about that," the geologist answered. He seemed to be thinking. Or listening. Wade wasn't certain whether Moss was thinking or listening, but he found himself listening too. He couldn't hear anything, except the dull splashes of the drops of water falling from the roof.

"If a person were a fool, it is doubtful if he would know it," Moss observed. "On the other hand, if a person were very wise, he might not know that, either. It's hard to know which we are."

Wade nodded. "Two fools hunting a ghost in a coal mine. We don't know whether there are such things as ghosts and we don't know whether we're fools, but we do know we're in a coal mine."

"Yes," Moss said. His voice sounded queer. "We know that. You know, I've been wondering how long the supply of coal will last."

"Oh, thousands of years," Wade said. "That's one thing we don't have to worry about. There's plenty of coal left for us."

"But the time is coming when there won't be plenty of coal," the geologist persisted. They both made their living off coal, and for that reason, if for no other, it was an all-absorbing topic of conversation.

"We still don't have to worry," Wade insisted. "There is certainly enough coal to last for hundreds of years and by that time other sources of power will have been invented. Atomic power, for instance, is right around the corner. At the most, the perfection of the process is not over twenty-five years off. If we have atomic power, we won't need so much coal."

"Three years," Moss corrected.

"Three years?"

"This is 1942, isn't it?"

"Of course, you damned fool."

"The production of power from atomic energy, by the use of Uranium 235, was perfected in 1945. That's three years from now. Oh, I grant you atomic power all right, and that will help tremendously, for a time, by supplying a new source of energy. But coal has other uses than in the production of power. Chemistry is absorbing huge quantities of it now, and will, in the future, absorb larger quantities. Even with atomic power, the time will come when somebody will need coal, and need it badly, and not have it."

The geologist was punctuating his sentences by jabbing his finger at Wade. "Even with atomic power"—finger punch—"the time will come when somebody will need coal"—finger punch—"and need it badly"—finger punch—"and not have it."

The superintendent stirred uneasily.

"Coal is a vital raw material," the geologist went on inexorably. "It is a magic substance out of which almost anything may be made. And sometime in the future, the life, the very existence, of the race, is going to depend on the possession of even a small supply of coal."

CLAD in the black slicker he was wearing to protect him from the dripping water, the geologist looked like some ancient alchemist lecturing to a neophyte, some Paracelsus in a

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dark cave expounding the natural order of creation.

Wade stirred again, twisting himself uncomfortably. He sensed, rather than knew, that something was wrong. He was aware that he was listening. There seemed to be some small sound, the cry of a voice heard from afar, attempting to intrude into his consciousness, But in this stygian cave, there was no one. He was aware of a chill creeping up his back.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "It is rather difficult to estimate what will be needed in the future. Because coal is important to us, we are inclined to assume it will be important to someone in the future. This is poor logic. It does not take into account the advance of technical knowledge. Coal may not be important at all to the people who live ten, twenty thousand years from now."

"You can take it from me that it will be important," Moss answered. He sounded as if he knew what he was talking about.

"If, for the sake of an argument, I grant that it will be of vital importance at some future time, so what? What are we to be expected to do about it? Set aside known coal fields for the benefit of a civilization that we aren't even certain is coming?"

The geologist nodded emphatically. "That's exactly what we had better do, if we want our great-great-grandson of twenty-five thousand years in the future to love us."

"That's too far for me to think ahead," Wade protested.

"Well, it may not be too far for him to think back," the geologist answered.

"I still say, 'So what?' I'll grant that you are theoretically correct, but what can I do about it?"

"He may do something about it."

"He?"

"That great-great-grandson we were discussing."

Wade grunted. He was feeling more uncomfortable every second. Something wasn't right, but for the life of him, he couldn't tell what it was. "What can he do?" he asked.

"Probably plenty. He'll be intelligent and he'll have tools and knowledge of which we never dream. Forces not yet discovered, forces possibly akin to electricity and yet not the same as electricity. Forces that will cause incomprehensible effects. My strong suggestion is that it will be extreme wisdom to take into consideration the needs of your great-great-grandson."

"Well," said Wade, "you may be right, but we didn't come down here to discuss the needs of a problematical great-great-grandson. We came down here to lay a ghost. What the devil was that?"

The sound lifted him to his feet. It was a sharp explosion, coming from somewhere within the mine. Not a blast. He was certain it wasn't a blast. The echoes distorted it but it sounded more like a pistol shot than like anything else.

"It came from that direction," the geologist said, pointing to the right prong of the V.

"No," said Wade. "It came from the left."

It came again. There was no mistaking it now. Someone was firing a pistol.

Who, in this place, could be firing a pistol?

Wade felt his flesh crawl but he was the type of man who could not run from anything he feared. He had to go toward it. "Come on," he said. "We'll see what's going on." He started down the left prong.

"It came from the right, I tell you," Moss insisted.

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"Have you gone crazy?" Wade stared at the geologist. They had an argument, brief but bitter. Each man was positive he was right and the other was wrong. "All right," Wade finally said bluntly. "You take the right prong and I'll take the left. One of us will be certain to find where it came from."

Wade was not being stubborn. He was certain the two shots—if they were shots—had come from the left prong of the V and he saw no reason to doubt the evidence of his own ears. He took the left prong. The last he saw of Jerry Moss, the geologist was hurrying down the prong that led to the right. There was no connection between the two prongs, except here at the V.

Dodging the low criss-cross of beams that supported the ceiling, Wade went forward. He seemed to hear in the far distance a voice calling weakly. For a second, the fleeting part of a second, cold fear struck him as he recalled that he had seemed to hear that same voice while he and Jerry had been talking.

THE voice went into silence, seemed to be gathering strength. Wade forced himself to walk on. He was nearing the end of the drift. The heading loomed ahead. Vaguely he could see where the mine props had slipped, releasing several of the cross beams. The timbers lay in a tangle on the floor.

"Damn it, Dave," a weak voice said from under the fallen timbers. "What in the hell have you been doing? I've shouted my damned head off for the last hour, trying to attract your attention. I knew you were waiting at the V, because I could see your light, but no matter how loud I yelled, you didn't seem to hear me. If I hadn't finally managed to get the pistol out of my pocket and shot it, I suppose you never would have heard me. What the hell have you been waiting for, anyhow? Why didn't you come and look for me when I didn't turn up?"

Caught under the fallen timbers was Jerry Moss.

Dave Wade, choked, swallowed. This was Jerry Moss under the timbers. No doubt about it. There was no connection between the two prongs of the V, no possible way that a man could have got from the right hand prong to the left hand prong.

Jerry was here. *Here!*

A thought sent terror through Wade's mind—if Jerry had been caught here under these timbers for the past hour, then who, or *what,* had been talking to him back there where the two prongs of the V came together?

There was no question but that Jerry Moss was trapped so he could not move. The heavy timbers pinned him down securely. Wade made a careful examination on this point, before he released Moss. It was all he could do to move the timbers himself. And when he managed to free the geologist, he discovered that Moss had suffered a broken ankle. But in spite of that, the geologist insisted on knowing what had happened.

Wade told him.

"You came here looking for a ghost," Moss said, after a silence. "It looks to me like you found one, and didn't know it."

"But—" Wade shivered.

"I give you my word of honor that *I* was not there with you at the prong of the V."

Wade shivered. "Your word is good with me," he said grimly. "Besides I *know* I found you here, with a broken ankle. But what was the thing that talked to me? And why did it look like you? And what did it want?"

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"Maybe it looked like me because you knew me and would accept me. You would not accept a stranger. Maybe it wanted to tell you something and if it looked like me, you would talk to it. And if you ask me what it was, I would say it was *he.*"

"He?"

"Yes. He of the future. He who is coming. I think you talked to him, somehow, across the veils of time."

"What you say is hard to believe," Wade said slowly.

"You disbelieve it at your own risk," the geologist answered. There was a grimness in his voice that sent Wade's mind back to the forces *he* would have at *his* command. "The important thing is, what are you going to do about it? You have authority here. You make the decisions about this mine. Are you going to believe *him,* or are you going to take what I think may be a great risk?"

"I'm thinking about that," Wade said. He was thinking about it all the time he carried the geologist to the lift.

ON the surface two men met them. One was the watchman. The other was Billy Patterson, the mine boss.

"What did you find, Mr. Wade?" the mine boss eagerly asked. "What did you find?"

Wade had made up his mind.

"Why, nothing," he answered slowly. "Nothing much, except that the roof of the mine is bad. I don't believe the vein is any too rich either. It seems to show indications of playing out pretty quickly. Under these circumstances, I doubt if it will prove profitable to continue operating this shaft. You come around to the office tomorrow morning, Billy, and I'll fix up your transfer to another mine."

"You're gonna abandon her, huh? You're gonna charge her off to profit and loss."

"Yes," said Wade. "That seems the best thing to do."

Jerry Moss was a silent listener to this conversation. Wade helped him hobble to the car, helped him in. "Are you really going to abandon the shaft?" the geologist questioned.

"Yes," Wade answered. "I'm going to close it—for three years."

"Why three years?"

"Because I remember something," Wade answered. "*He* said 'Atomic power was perfected in 1945.' That's three years from now. If atomic power is perfected in 1945, I will know I really talked to *him,* and this mine will stay closed, so *he* can use this coal, thousands of years from now."

"And if it isn't perfected by then?"

A tiger growled in Wade's voice. "Then he is a false prophet and I have been the victim of an hallucination, and I will put this mine into operation if I have to dig every ton of coal in it with my bare hands!"

Down in Kentucky Dave Wade is patiently waiting for 1945 to come. At the end of that year, he will know what to believe. In the meantime, the mine stays closed.

Will we have atomic power in 1945?

MEN ARE FUMBLE-TONGUES, SAYS SCIENCE

AN eminent authority on speech recently showed that males are more prone to stuttering than are the female of the species. He attributes this to the fact that women are more nimble mentally than are men and can, therefore, express themselves more clearly. Men, on the other hand, will often cling to an idea so long that when they express themselves their thoughts are all garbled up. The poor stuttering male, becoming aware of his defect, will worry about it and this only tends to increase his defect.

Carter C. Wainwright.

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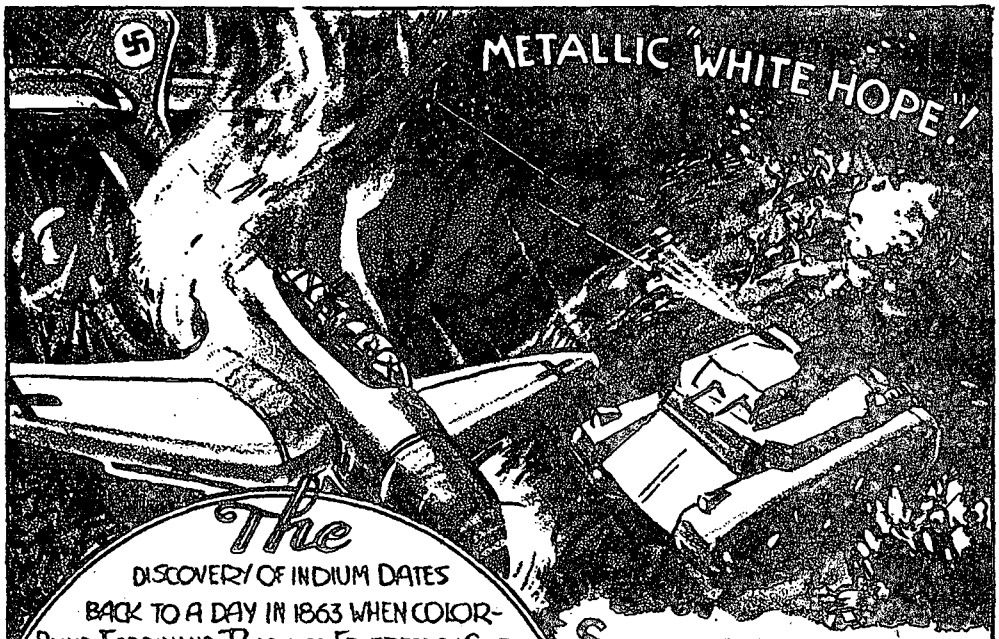
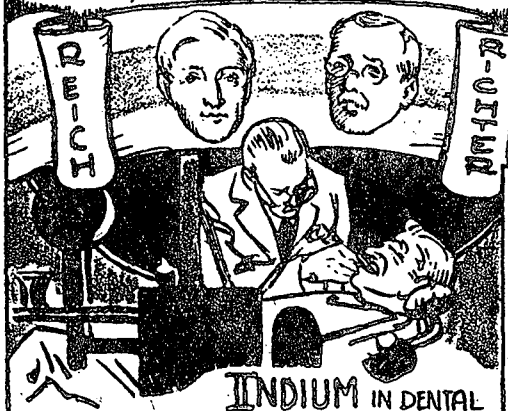
ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS—INDIUM



The DISCOVERY OF INDIUM DATES BACK TO A DAY IN 1863 WHEN COLOR-BLIND FERDINAND REICH OF FRIEBERG, GERMANY, HANDED HIS ASSISTANT, RICHTER, A YELLOW PRECIPITATE. "TEST THIS SPECTROSCOPICALLY" REICH SAID, "AND YOU'LL FIND A NEW ELEMENT." RICHTER DID AS HE WAS TOLD, AND SAW FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE INDIGO LINES OF AN UNKNOWN ELEMENT.



INDIUM IN DENTAL ALLOYS MAKES THEM STABLE AND TARNISH-RESISTANT; IT IS USED IN THE HINGES OF SPECTACLES TO KEEP THEM PERSPERATION-PROOF. METALLURGISTS PREDICT AN IMPORTANT FUTURE FOR INDIUM; A REAL "WHITE HOPE" AMONG THE ELEMENTS!

SCIENCE FOUND RECENTLY THAT SMALL AMOUNTS OF INDIUM, ELECTROLYTICALLY DEPOSITED ON METAL BEARING SURFACES, PRACTICALLY ELIMINATE FATIGUE-FAILURE, FOIL OIL-ACID CORROSION, AND THUS LICK AN OLD-TIME INDUSTRIAL PROBLEM! NOW THIS AMAZING WHITE METAL IS IMPORTANT TO AIRPLANE AND AUTOMOTIVE ENGINE BUILDERS!

AS LATE AS 1924, A WORLD-SEARCH FOR METALLIC INDIUM UNCOVERED JUST ONE TINY OUNCE OF THE SUBSTANCE! IGNORANCE OF ITS POTENTIAL USEFULNESS HAD KEPT THIS VALUABLE ELEMENT RARER THAN A MUSEUM SPECIMEN, MORE COSTLY THAN PLATINUM. TODAY, 99+% PURE INDIUM COSTS LESS THAN $15.00 PER OUNCE!

INDIUM is number 49 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is In, and its atomic weight is 114.8. It is a soft, malleable metal about as heavy as tin. It melts at 155° C. and vaporizes above 1,450 C. Its specific gravity is 7.2 to 7.42 and its specific heat 0.05695. It is obtained by treating commercial zinc with insufficient hydrochloric acid to completely dissolve the zinc, whereupon the indium precipitates itself on the surface of the remaining undissolved metal.

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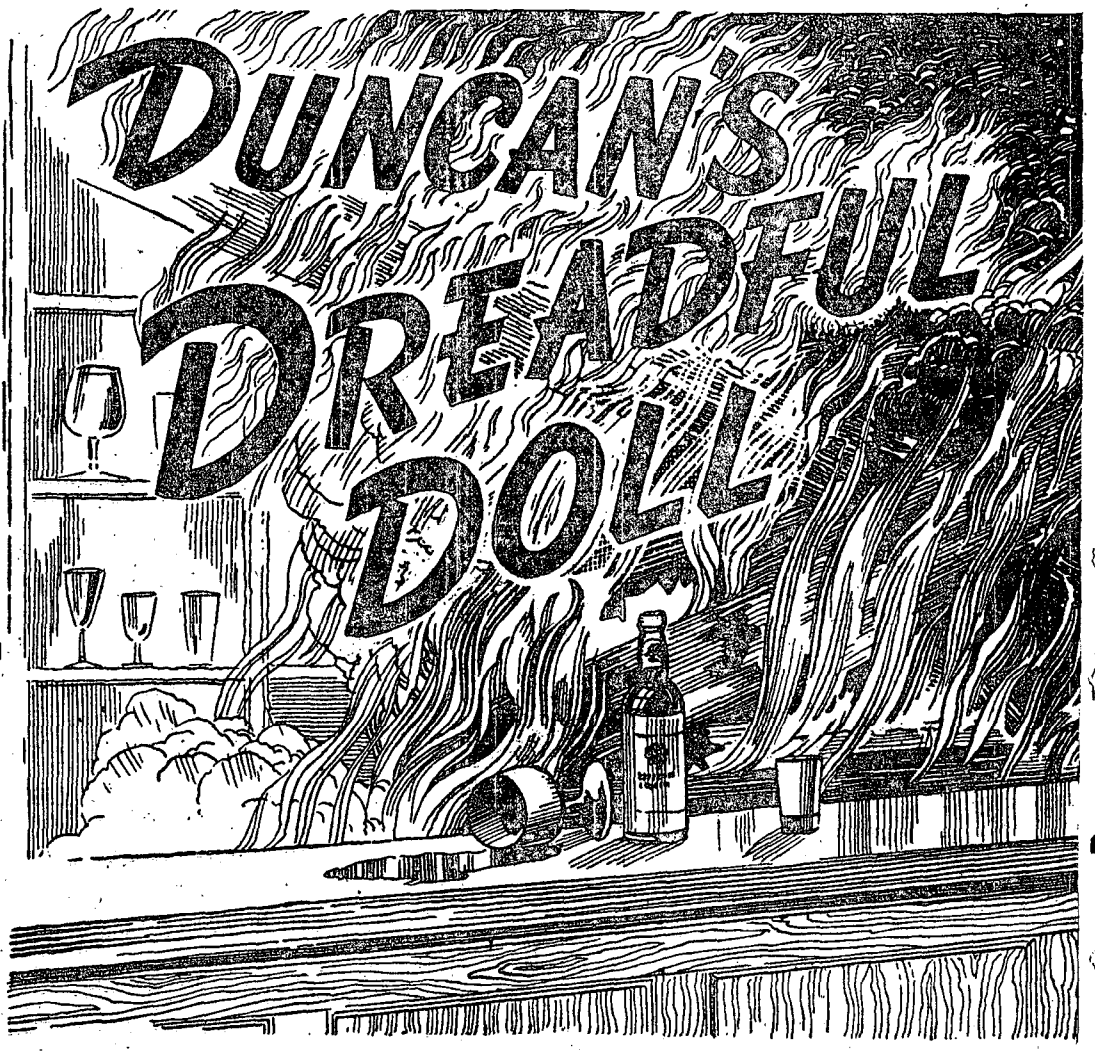

by P. F. COSTELLO

DUNCAN DIGIT was a tall, amiable young man with an immense capacity for Scotch whisky and an equally immense capacity for making a fool of himself on any and all occasions.

Perhaps he had other qualifications but no one had ever noticed their existence. If such qualities did exist they were dwarfed by his two more prominent characteristics.

At the present moment he was displaying these two major idiosyncrasies to the crowd that thronged about his night club table.

With a wide smile, that had a fixed frozen quality, he raised his glass in an unsteady gesture.

"Eat, drink and be merry," he chirruped gaily, "for tomorrow I die."

The blonde at his right hiccoughed apprehensively but Duncan regarded her solemnly.

"Ish truth," he assured her mournfully. Over the din provided by the exceedingly brassy band, he repeated

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Duncan Digit found it was extremely necessary to see that no harm came to the doll, because what happened to it was what happened to him. Then he lost it—and things happened!

The doll was hot—and so was Duncan!

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sadly, "tomorrow I die. My dear aunt ish arriving tomorrow to cut me out of her will. Like that!"

With an emphatic gesture, he brought the edge of his palm down on the table. A glass toppled and spilled. Scotch dribbled to the floor. Duncan watched this waste sadly.

"Ish shame," he muttered. "Tomorrow I die."

In spite of Duncan's state of mind, everyone else at the small, crowded night club seemed to be in high spirits. Liquor flowed merrily and the babel of voices was frenziedly gay.

The only other person who seemed to share Duncan's melancholy was a wrinkled, ragged Gypsy who stood in one corner of the room and moodily observed the festivities. On her fat brown arms a dozen charm bracelets clinked together as she moved, and a red and white bandana was draped over her dark greasy hair.

Madam Pilar had every right to be unhappy. She had to spend six nights a week in the hot, airless, smoke-filled club, and that was enough to make anyone unhappy.

SHE worked at the club as a fortune teller and seer, and since the fortunes of the crowd were invariably not worth telling, the job was very dull.

Disconsolately she moved about the room and finally stopped before Duncan's table.

He looked up and blinked drowsily. Then he shook his head and took another gulp from his drink.

"Ish better than pink elephants," he muttered philosophically. Looking again, he was pleased to discover that the apparition had not vanished. Maybe it wasn't an apparition.

"Have a drink?" he asked warily. "Tomorrow I die," he added in the way of further inducement.

"Thank you," Madam Pilar said in a toneless voice. She sat down. "Why do you die tomorrow?"

"I got enemies," Duncan said vaguely.

"Who are they?" the Gypsy demanded.

Duncan burped sleepily. "Too many to count."

The Gypsy leaned forward and regarded him steadily.

"I have charms to protect you," she whispered.

Duncan brightened. "Thas' good. Need lotsa charms."

The Gypsy brought forth a small ragged doll from the voluminous folds of her dress. It was about ten inches high. The face of the doll was completely blank.

"Do you notice the resemblance?" the Gypsy whispered impressively.

"Spitting image," Duncan said, nodding vigorously.

"This will protect your body from physical harm," said the Gypsy. "Never leave it out of your possession."

Duncan stared blearily at the doll.

"Ish cute," he said fondly.

The Gypsy dug into her dress again and brought out a small scissors. With a quick gesture she snipped a lock of hair from Duncan's head.

Duncan nodded approvingly.

"Just a trim, though," he said, wagging a finger.

The Gypsy took his hands in hers then and rapidly snipped the nails from his index and middle fingers. She wrapped the lock of hair about the nail parings and stuffed the tiny ball into an opening in the doll's chest.

"The voodoo spell of the doll will protect you always," the Gypsy said solemnly. "Keep it always with you and you will be safe. Never, never, leave it out of your possession. Do you understand?"

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Duncan looked into the eyes of the Gypsy. They burned strangely at him, piercing through his alcoholic stupor.

He reached out and took the doll in his arms.

"I understand," he said, hiccoughing jerkily. "The lill' guy stays with me from now on. Jush like to see somebody take him away." He smiled blissfully down into the doll's blank face. "We're pals, thatsh what we are!"

When he looked up again the Gypsy was gone.

DUNCAN awoke the next morning in his own apartment. The events of the previous night were vague and cloudy, but he was agreeably surprised to discover that his head felt normal.

He lay in bed for a few moments staring at the ceiling, and then he became aware that he seemed to be bouncing slightly on the mattress.

The sensation was not unpleasant, but it was definitely disturbing. He sat up straight, but he continued to bounce up and down.

"Well, well," he said aloud.

The door of his room opened then, and his valet, a thin, impeccable, imperturbable little man, entered, bearing a tray in one hand and an ice pack in the other.

"Good morning, sir," he said.

"Is it?" Duncan was still rocking about on the bed and his mind was occupied with that problem. He didn't care whether it was a good morning or not.

"Look here, Beetle," he said abruptly, "am I bouncing around on this bed, or am I not?"

Beetle set the tray down and considered the situation.

"Yes, sir," he said gravely.

"Yes, what?"

"You definitely seem to be bouncing. Do you find it diverting?"

"Hang it, Beetle," Duncan said plaintively, "I'm not doing it on purpose."

"Really sir," Beetle's tone was politely astonished, but not particularly interested.

Duncan continued to bounce on the mattress. "Was I very drunk last night, Beetle?" he asked.

"No more than usual, sir."

"I presume I made an utter fool of myself," Duncan said gloomily.

"I presume so, sir."

Duncan climbed from the bed. The solid floor felt comforting, but his shoulders and body were still shaking in an annoyingly rhythmic fashion.

Even though he was absorbed with this disturbing phenomenon, he gradually became aware that Beetle was waiting to tell him something. And one look at the strained lines on the man's normally impassive face was enough to warn him that the news he bore was unpleasant. "Well, Beetle," he said resignedly, "what is it?"

"Your aunt has arrived, sir." Beetle's voice was quietly despairing as he added, "She is waiting for you in the sitting room. If I may say so, sir, she seems a most determined woman."

"Hah!" Duncan cried bleakly. "That's a classic understatement. Is she alone?"

"There is a young lady with her," Beetle stated. "Her name is Elvira Scragg."

"Lovely name," Duncan said bitterly. "Reminds one of a riveting factory during the rush hour. Elvira Scragg! Bah!"

"Shall I tell them you will see them right away?" Beetle asked.

DUNCAN sat gloomily on the edge of the bed, and although he was

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still bouncing about, his mind was on other matters. His aunt, a majestic creature named Agatha, was here for the express purpose of cutting him out of any share in her estate. Duncan gnawed nervously on his finger nails. That was a pretty situation. If he couldn't keep on the right side of her during her stay, there was no chance of her changing her mind. He sighed heavily.

"Tell them I'll be right out. Ask them if they've had breakfast. Be nice to them Beetle. Remember the old Digit fortunes hang in the balance."

A half hour later Duncan, dressed and shaved and looking reasonably fresh, strode into the sitting room of his apartment a desperately cheery word of welcome on his lips.

"Dear old Auntie!"

His full-throated bellow brought a flicker of annoyance to the face of the large, granite-visaged female who was sitting in the room's most comfortable chair.

Duncan's Aunt Agatha looked up at him in faint disgust.

"How do you do, Duncan," she said, with a commendable attempt at civility. "This," she said, waving a careless hand at a large, lumpy girl who was looking anxiously at Duncan, "is Miss Elvira Scragg, the daughter of my oldest and dearest friend—for heaven's sake, what's the matter with you?"

Duncan's shoulders were still bouncing and jogging about and there was nothing he could do to improve the situation.

His aunt was peering closely at him with a slightly alarmed expression on her face.

"What is it? St. Vitus Dance?"

"Oh, no, no," Duncan said quickly, "nothing like that. How do you do, Miss Scragg." He changed the subject and nodded to the young lady and was rewarded by a toothsome grin and an awkward mumble in acknowledgment.

But his aunt was not to be distracted.

"Duncan!" she said sharply. "You don't seem well. Why are you shaking and bouncing about? Stop it this instant, I say!"

It was a time for desperate measures. Duncan executed a hippety-hop dance step and writhed his shoulders like a snake with prickly heat.

"Just a little dance step I picked up," he explained glibly. "It's the rage of the town now. They call it the Jive Bomber. Everybody's doing it."

"Oh," Miss Elvira Scragg cried, "it looks exciting. Can we do it together?"

From the firing pan into the fire, Duncan thought miserably.

"It's strictly a solo," he said rapidly.

"Oh."

At that fortunate moment Beetle entered the room to announce breakfast.

"Fine," Duncan cried. "I'm starved. Would you care for a spot of bacon and eggs, auntie?"

"At three in the afternoon!" Aunt Agatha was aghast.

"Oh," Duncan said.

Elvira and his Aunt followed him into the breakfast nook that commanded a sweeping, inspiring view of the park. It was a cozy spot but Duncan was in no mood to enjoy his breakfast or the esthetic appeal of the scenery.

As Beetle brought in the coffee, Aunt Agatha cleared her throat impressively. Duncan was still bouncing around on his chair, wondering when the hell the crazy nonsense would stop.

"Duncan," Aunt Agatha said, "I have good news for you. Frankly, at one time, I considered disposing of my fortune to charity, instead of leaving it to you, my sole relative."

Duncan listened hopefully and for-

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got about his jouncing, bouncing body.

"But I have changed my mind," Aunt Agatha continued. "I feel that my money should stay in the family. While I do not consider you competent to handle my affairs, I believe that if you selected a proper marital partner, one who would exert a temperate influence over your irresponsible nature, the steadying result of such an arrangement might transform you into the sort of person to whom I could safely leave my property. In short Duncan, you must marry; and you must marry a girl who will be a rock of caution and prudence and firmness. A rock to which you can anchor yourself forever."

DUNCAN gagged slightly on his coffee. The horrible vision his aunt's words called up was bad enough; but he had a terrible premonition of the "rock" his aunt had in mind.

Again Aunt Agatha cleared her throat.

"Such a girl," she declared impressively, "is Elvira Scragg, daughter of my dearest friend. She would be a wonderful wife for any man, but for you Duncan she would be absolutely perfect."

Duncan's terrifying premonition had not been wrong. He allowed himself a quick glance at Elvira Scragg. God! Things were far worse than he had imagined. If he wanted any slice of his aunt's vast estate, and he certainly did, he would have to link himself with this lumpy, streaky-haired, toothesomely-grinning creature.

So perturbed was he by this dreadful thought, that he didn't notice it immediately when his peculiar bouncing and shaking suddenly ceased.

When he did realize that once again he was his normal stable self, he felt immensely relieved. It was difficult enough to face Aunt Agatha and her strategems, without having the thing complicated by an attack of whirling dervish tantrums.

Elvira Scragg noticed his sudden immobility; the sudden cessation of his twitching torso apparently fascinated her.

"Oh," she said, "is that the end of the Jive Bomber dance?"

"What?" Duncan asked blankly. Then: "Oh yes, that's the wind-up. There'll be a slight wait for the next show."

"I do not intend to be unreasonable," Aunt Agatha continued, impervious to the interruptions. "I will give you and Elvira a period to become acquainted before you become betrothed. I am sure Duncan, that you appreciate the wisdom of my decision in this matter. Even if you don't, it does not matter. Aunt Agatha knows best."

Elvira looked hungrily at Duncan.

"I'm sure she does," she said in a voice that practically gloated.

Duncan felt suddenly faint. Like a condemned man he slowly began to eat his bacon and eggs. . . .

AT THE same time, but in another section of the city, a taxi driver by the name of Mike Rafferty, climbed from his cab before a wooden building which housed his favorite saloon.

Mike Rafferty was feeling in a very glum state of mind as he opened the rear door of the cab to make his usual morning inspection for chance dimes or nickels sometimes dropped on the floor of his cab.

He was feeling glum because the last of his passengers had been a drunken young playboy, who had passed out before Mike could get him to his destination. It had been necessary for him to practically carry the young sot up to his apartment, and the young bum was not a light load.

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Grumbling morosely to himself he opened the door. The first thing he saw on the floor of his cab was a small rag doll. He remembered then that the drunken playboy had been holding the doll in his arms when he got into the cab, but in his drunken stupor he had forgotten to take it with him.

The thing was of no value at all, Mike decided. Just a cheap rag doll the young man had taken a drunken fancy to. The young drunk, he remembered, had placed it carefully on the seat beside him, but it had fallen to the floor.

"Sure," Mike said aloud, "it must have taken a bouncing around here on the floor of the cab."

Disgustedly he picked up the doll and entered the saloon. The bartender was wiping the bar with a damp rag when he saw Mike walk in, carrying the rag doll in one hand.

"So you finally reached your second childhood, eh?" he jeered. "Started carrying dolls, have you?"

Mike sat wearily on a bar stool and ordered a drink. He tossed the doll onto the damp bar.

"Some drunken young fool left it in my hack last night," he explained. He shook his head gloomily. "What's the young generation comin' to, I wonder." He looked more closely at the doll. "Sure, and that's funny," he said. "What is?" the bartender said, sliding a stein of suds along the bar.

"I just noticed," Mike said, "that this little raggedy doll looks surprising like the young man who left it in my hack."

The bartender bent over and joined in the scrutiny.

"Well," he said, "the young fool couldn't've looked like much, is all I can say."

"He didn't," Mike said gloomily.

"What're you goin' to do with it?" the bartender asked.

"Me? What would I be doin' with it? Throw it out, that's what, and good riddance."

The bartender picked up the doll and tossed it carelessly under the bar.

"That'll save you the trouble," he said. "My sweeper will throw it into the garbage when he cleans up tonight."

The two men went on talking and the doll was forgotten.

Neither of them noticed that it had landed under the beer spigot and that the steady drippings from the spigot splashed across its head. In a very few moments the doll had become a soggy beer-saturated mess. . . .

DUNCAN ate his breakfast without relish. Even though the bacon was succulently crisp and the eggs were smoothly golden, he couldn't work up much enthusiasm.

His Aunt Agatha and Elvira regarded him unwinkingly as he ate, and that didn't help his composure particularly.

The ultimatum which his aunt had delivered left him with a limp battered feeling. The gruesome proposition boiled down to one of two things. Marry this repulsive girl, Elvira, and be in the money; spurn her and face the world a pauper.

Duncan shuddered. It was ghastly. He opened his mouth to pop in a piece of toast, but before he could do so, he suddenly hiccoughed, unmistakably, loudly and clearly.

There was a moment of startled silence in the room.

Aunt Agatha looked at him as if he were a bug under a microscope slide.

Duncan mumbled an apology and went back to his food guiltly.

But something was terribly wrong!

The fork fell from his suddenly clumsy fingers. He knocked over a glass of water reaching for it. In the middle of this confusion he hiccoughed again.

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Aunt Agatha and Elvira were peering at him in startled amazement.

"What *is* the matter?" Aunt Agatha demanded.

Duncan hiccoughed gently and the knife fell from his fingers with a strident clatter.

The room seemed to be whirling about before his eyes. There was a dull roaring sound between his ears and a hot ball in his stomach.

The signs were unmistakable.

He was drunk! Absolutely. There could be no doubt of it. In another few minutes he would fall on his face. But he hadn't taken a drink since he'd climbed out of bed.

What *was* the matter with him?

Even in his foggy state he realized that there was something monstrously peculiar about the whole situation. How could he have suddenly become blind drunk without so much as having smelled a cork? It was impossible! It was incredible! Still—it was a fact!

He glanced owlishly from Aunt Agatha to Elvira. He noticed with dismay that they were both looking at him in frozen horror.

That wouldn't do. This wasn't the way to creep into their hearts and impress them with his sterling virtues.

He'd have to show them the true Duncan. The gentleman and scholar, the *bon vivant,* the hail-fellow-well-met.

He leaned back in his chair and hooked his thumbs in his vest pockets. His eyes shifted lewdly from Aunt Agatha to Elvira.

"What a pair of bags," he muttered thickly.

"*What!*" cried Aunt Agatha, rising to her feet.

"No offense, no offense," Duncan said in a vain attempt at mollification. "Just a slang expression I picked up in the pool room. Neat, isn't it?"

He also rose to his feet, but he knocked his chair over backwards in the effort. He swayed slightly on the balls of his feet, while the room swayed with him.

AT THAT point Beetle entered. To his credit he took in the situation in one rapid glance.

Gently, but firmly, he took Duncan's arm and led him from the room. Duncan's last memory was sprawling on a comfortable bed and licking his lips contentedly. Then the scene faded into oblivion.

When he opened his eyes again Beetle was standing beside the bed, arms folded, face expressionless and eyes sternly disapproving.

"Whash a matter?" Duncan said thickly.

"Are you feeling better?" Beetle asked frigidly.

"What happened?" Duncan demanded. "How did I get drunk?"

"Is the *modus operandi* important, sir?" Beetle asked icily.

"Yes," Duncan said, making an effort to sit up. "*How* I got drunk is the most important thing of all. I didn't take a drink. I didn't even look at a bottle. And still I suddenly pass out. Maybe it was something I ate."

Beetle sniffed the air significantly.

"The aroma you notice, sir," he said, "is hardly that of bacon or eggs. If I may suggest sir, it is the fumes of strong ale that permeate the room."

Duncan sniffed. Beetle was right. The room smelled like a brewery. A sudden ghastly thought struck him.

"Aunt Agatha!" he cried. "Is she still here?"

"Yes," said Beetle. "I succeeded in persuading her that what she witnessed was a violent attack of *Septileam Infectorius.* I explained that you had been subject to its malign effects for several weeks."

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"What the hell is *Septileaum Infec*—whatchamecallit?" Duncan demanded anxiously.

"Nothing, as far as I know, sir. It is merely a name I coined on the spur of the moment to meet the emergency."

"Thank you, Beetle," Duncan said gratefully.

"You're quite welcome, sir."

"You've got to help me, Beetle. This thing is driving me crazy. Why should I get drunk when I haven't been drinking? And do you remember this morning? The way I bounced around like a roulette ball and couldn't help myself? Something's happening to me, I tell you. Beetle, you've simply got to put the brain to work on this thing, before I go completely potty."

Beetle frowned faintly and tweaked his nose. Duncan took heart. That was one of the infallible signs that Beetle was thinking. Duncan had great faith in Beetle's mental equipment. He waited humbly while Beetle turned the matter over.

"It might help, sir," Beetle said, at last, "if you would tell me in detail what you remember of last night."

DUNCAN told everything he remembered. Talking stimulated his own memory and finally the incident of the Gypsy and the doll came back to him. He had forgotten that completely. Now he unburdened himself of the entire story, feeling quite sheepish.

But Beetle was not amused. Instead he tweaked his nose again reflectively.

"A doll, was it?" he said softly. "How extremely interesting. And did I understand you to say that the Gypsy warned you not to leave the doll out of your possession?"

"Yes," Duncan said, "she seemed quite insistent about that."

"Where is the doll now?" Beetle asked.

"Hang it, I don't know," Duncan said. "What difference does it make?"

"Have you ever heard of Voodooism, sir?" Beetle asked.

"Certainly," Duncan said. "It's that nonsense they put on for the tourists down in Harlem." He paused and looked uncertainly at Beetle. "Isn't it?" he asked weakly.

"While serving Lord Hummerly in Haiti," Beetle said, tweaking his nose thoughtfully, "it was my pleasure to learn something of the rites of the Voodoo clan. One of the most common means a native employs to rid himself of an enemy is to construct a doll that resembles the intended victim and then stick pins into this doll until the enemy is—ah—no more. Quite interesting, what?"

"Damn it, what's interesting about it?" Duncan said nervously. "It sounds perfectly silly."

Beetle smiled and stroked his chin. There was a mellow, reminiscent light in his eyes.

"I remember as if it were yesterday the case of Lord's gardener and the native cook. The gardener angered the cook and the cook took a very neat revenge through voodoo. Ah! Those were the days."

"Well, what happened?" demanded Duncan. He felt a touch of perspiration on his forehead.

"Nothing sensational," Beetle said. "The gardener, poor chap, died a raving madman a week or so later. I remember to this day how distressed m'Lord was over the whole affair. You see, this gardener was the only fellow in the neighborhood who could make tulips grow in that climate. Naturally, he was missed."

"Naturally," Duncan croaked.

"Do you see," Beetle smiled, "why I think it is rather necessary that we learn the whereabouts of this doll the

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Gypsy gave you. If it is a true voodoo doll the situation is rather serious. For anything that happens to the doll will likewise happen to you."

"Oh," groaned Duncan. "This is terrible. Why did she give it to me anyway?"

Beetle shrugged.

"Gypsies have a rather nasty sense of humor, sir. Of course, had you kept the doll in your possession, nothing could have harmed you. Since you have lost the doll you are in a somewhat serious predicament."

"Well, we've got to find it," Duncan said desperately. "The last thing I remember about last night is getting into a cab."

"Ah!" Beetle cried. "You see it is working already. The bouncing, jostling sensation that affected you this morning was undoubtedly a result of the doll's bouncing about in the rear of the cab. This narrows down our field of speculation quite considerably. Now in what club did you encounter this Gypsy? I think it expedient that we contact her without delay. Really, I find this problem quite absorbing."

Duncan was feeling quite sick. The thought of a dreadful doll, his *alter ego*, lost in the wide city where it could be stepped on, kicked around, torn apart or thrown into the lake, was unnerving. The unnerving thought was that whatever happened to the doll would happen to him. Some brat might pick it up and pull the stuffings out of it!

He lay back weakly, while his insides performed a complete flip-flop. A sheen of perspiration beaded his forehead.

"It was at the Scimitar club," he said faintly. "And for God's sake hurry!"

"Righto, sir. Cheerio."

With that Beetle left.

FOR the next hour Duncan tossed from one side of the bed to the other, his imagination running riot. Every possible assault and indignity that could be perpetrated on the human frame leaped before his mind's eye, and was only banished by the thought of some more horrifying possibility.

Supposing a car ran over the doll!

He could almost feel the pressure on his chest and for several seconds he could hardly breathe. Or maybe someone would decide to use the doll for a pin cushion!

This anguishing idea was replaced by the thought of what would happen to him if the doll were discarded into a garbage can somewhere.

When Beetle finally returned Duncan was bathed in a pool of nervous perspiration, and his body was limply exhausted. Beetle's first remarks did not cheer him.

"It's very odd, sir, but the Gypsy seems to have disappeared," he said. "No trace of the woman at all. That complicates matters a bit. Incidentally, your aunt and the young lady are still waiting in the sitting room. Have you any word for them?"

"Nothing printable," Duncan muttered. "We've got to do something about this—" He broke off suddenly.

"What is it, sir?"

"Beetle," Duncan cried in a strangled voice. "Something is happening to me."

"Excellent," Beetle beamed. "Perhaps the symptoms will afford a clue as to the whereabouts of the doll."

Duncan unknotted his tie and opened his collar.

"I'm getting warm," he gasped. "No! I'm getting *hot!* All over. Do something!"

Beetle tweaked his nose agitatedly.

"That is a rather vague symptom," he pointed out. "Couldn't you give me something more definite?"

"I'm starting to roast!" Duncan

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howled. "What more do you want? A barbecued arm with salt and pepper?"

With sudden decision Beetle reached for the phone.

"I think I have something," he said. "Operator, will you give me the fire department, please."

Duncan swallowed nervously.

"Fire Marshal?" Beetle inquired pleasantly, a moment later. "How do you do, sir. This is the residence of Duncan Digit. What? No, we do not have a fire here. Yes, that is fortunate."

"Cut out the play-by-play description," Duncan shouted.

Beetle looked coldly at Duncan and then turned back to the receiver.

"Perhaps you can tell me, sir, if there have been any fires reported within the last few moments. It is rather urgent. Yes, I'll wait."

"What did he say?" Duncan yelled. His shirt was hanging damply to his shoulders and he felt as if he were sitting on a griddle.

"He said," Beetle replied slowly. "that he would find out. Compose yourself, sir." He turned back to the receiver. "Yes? A tavern? Will you repeat that address, please? Thank you, I have it. Thank you, very much." He hung up.

"What's the dope?" Duncan demanded.

"A tavern sent in an alarm not three minutes ago," Beetle said triumphantly. "This is capital, sir. Your drunken orgy this morning is now understandable. Somehow, the doll was taken to a tavern. There it became saturated with ale—a poor grade, I might add,—and your subsequent inebriation was the result. Now that tavern is burning to the ground. It is a wooden frame and I understand that it is going quite rapidly. That accounts for your uncomfortable feeling at the moment. Can't you see how undeniably logical the chain of events is, sir?"

"Damn the logic," Duncan shouted. "What's going to happen to me when that infernal doll goes up in smoke?"

Beetle cleared his throat delicately.

"Hasn't it always been your wish to be cremated, sir?"

Duncan leaped from the bed and struggled into his coat.

"Yes, damn it," he said, "but not until I'm dead."

"What are your plans, sir? Do you wish a change of clothing? A light snack, perhaps."

"Hell no," Duncan exploded. "I'm going to save that doll if I have to become a one-man fire department. And you're coming with me. You've got the address. Snap into it."

HE TORE out of the bedroom, down the hall and through the sitting room like a race horse. Aunt Agatha and Elvira leaped to their feet as he burst into the room.

"Where *are* you going?" Aunt Agatha demanded shrilly. "I demand that you remain here. I forbid you to leave. Your manners are positively barbarious. Elvira has been waiting two hours to talk to you and now you are trying to rush out of the house like a madman. I won't have it, I say. I refuse to be treated like a sack of ashes."

Duncan continued his sprint for the door. Over his shoulder he shouted: "That goes for me, too!"

He practically flew down the three flights of steps to the street. Beetle was at his heels, panting but grim.

"A cab! A cab!" Duncan shouted. He waved wildly at the whizzing traffic. Even in the cold spring air Duncan was as warm as toast—burnt toast. "If we don't get a cab soon, it'll be too late," he moaned.

As if in answer to prayer a *Yellow*

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noticed his frantic gestures and slashed over to the curb with a shrieking wail from protesting brakes.

"Hop in, buddy," the cabby snapped.

Duncan jumped into the cab and dragged Beetle after him. Beetle gave the driver the address. It was at the lower end of town and a good distance away.

"We would appreciate it," Beetle said, settling back comfortably, "if you take the shortest route. We are in somewhat of a hurry. However, I shouldn't advise you to drive recklessly."

Duncan grabbed the cabby by the shoulder before he released the clutch.

"Listen, Buddy," he said tensely, "I don't care how you drive but get us there in three minutes and it'll be worth a hundred bucks to you. I'll take care of any tickets you get for speeding."

"For a hundred bucks I'd take you to Mars," the driver yelled over his shoulder. "But don't worry about tickets for speeding. Any tickets we get will be for flying too low!"

The cab shot away from the curb like a scorched rabbit. Horns blasted angrily as the cab sliced through the traffic like a broken field runner and streaked down the left side of the street through a red light and onto the boulevard.

Beetle covered his eyes with his hands and sank against the cushions. The ride was a nightmare. Over safety islands, through red lights, around red-faced policemen, the cab scurried across the town like something inspired from Dante's *Inferno*.

And Duncan continued to sweat. As the minutes passed his condition grew worse. Any minute he expected blisters to start popping out on the back of his neck.

Finally the cab swung off the boulevard, raced down a side street and came to a shuddering stop before an intersection that had been roped off by the fire department.

"Close as I can get," the cabby panted.

"Close enough," Duncan snapped. He kicked open the door of the cab and raced toward the roped-off crowd that was watching the dramatic and fiery destruction of the wooden frame building that housed the tavern.

USING his elbows, his knees and his voice, Duncan jammed and fought his way to the front of the line, but there he was stopped by a shouting cop, who placed a heavy hand on his chest and shoved him backward.

"We got our orders," he snarled. "Nobody goes through and that means you, mister."

"Oh, yeah?" Duncan shouted.

With all his strength he kicked the cop squarely in the shins. The cop doubled over with an agonized bellow and Duncan slipped under the rope and sprinted across the cleared area that surrounded the burning building.

The heat was intense. In fact, it would have been unbearable had not Duncan been practically burning up himself. As it was, he hardly noticed the blasts of scorching air that billowed against his face and body.

He dashed through the raging flames that forked tongue-like from the blazing interior and staggered into the main room of the tavern. Instinct led him unerringly through the inferno to the bar. He knew the doll must be there, for it couldn't have made him drunk unless it was close to the liquor supply—

Not liquor. Ale!

He clambered over the charred and burning bar and dropped behind it. Choking and blinded he fell to his knees and crawled toward the ale tape. His hands swept over the floor in circles

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as he inched painfully forward. Then a roaring draft of air swept along the bar blowing the dense billowing smoke away, and in that sudden instant of vision Duncan saw what he was looking for.

The doll, badly scorched and smouldering was within inches of him. It took him only an instant to reach it and stuff it into his shirt.

Then he staggered to his feet. He realized he was only barely in time. The heavy beams of the ceiling were already sagging dangerously. In another twenty seconds the whole building would probably give way with a crash.

He was staggering toward the door when he heard a faint sound that stopped him in his tracks. Turning he peered into the swirling smoke and leaping flames.

In the corner of the room a man was lying on his stomach, helplessly attempting to crawl to his knees. It was his moan that Duncan had heard. The man was huge and fat and a white apron he was wearing identified him as the bartender.

Duncan lurched to the man's side, knelt and hoisted him to his shoulder. It took all of his waning strength to struggle to his feet. Swaying perilously he moved toward the door, blinded by the acrid smoke and the perspiration that poured from his forehead.

AS HE reached the doorway he heard the timbers of the ceiling give way with a tremendous rending crash. A rush of scorching air swept over him, and long, greedily licking flames roared with suddenly increased fury about him.

With his last rush of strength he charged through the doorway and fell into the cleared area that surrounded the building. He didn't hear the building crash; he didn't hear the sudden sharp roar from the crowd as they saw him stagger from the blazing doorway; he didn't hear the popping of flashlight bulbs as quick-thinking photographers recorded for posterity the evidence of his heroism.

He heard none of this, saw none of this. For he was completely out. . . .

THREE days later, swathed in bandages, Duncan was able to sit up in his comfortable bedroom. Scattered about the floor were dozens of papers carrying the story, complete with pictures of his daring rescue.

Duncan was the city's hero. If an election had been held that week Duncan could have been elected Mayor.

Aunt Agatha tip-toed cautiously into the room and seeing that he was sitting up, hurried to his side.

"My dear boy," she cried solicitously, "are you feeling better? Is there something I can do for you? Something I can bring you?"

"Nothing at all," Duncan said. "Except for a general fricasseed feeling, I'm all right."

"That's splendid," Aunt Agatha said enthusiastically, "because I want to talk to you about a very important matter. I've definitely decided that you are just the type to handle all of my affairs. Your heroism has proven your true worth beyond a doubt."

Duncan beamed through the network of bandages that swathed his face. Things couldn't be better.

"But," Aunt Agatha said, "I haven't changed my mind about the necessity of choosing a suitable matrimonial partner for you. Elvira is still my choice and when you are well you will have the opportunity to become better acquainted with the dear girl. I'm sure you'll agree with me then that she will make an ideal mate for you."

Duncan's face frowned beneath the maze of bandages. Things couldn't be

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worse! Had he gone through all of this only to wind up tied to Elvira for life. If he had known that was in store for him he would have stayed in the burning tavern. At least, he thought darkly, that wouldn't have been permanent.

A discreet knock sounded on the door then and, an instant later, Beetle entered, suave and imperturbable as always. With him was Elvira Scragg. She was beaming idiotically.

"Elvira," Aunt Agatha said, "Where have you been? I've been looking all over for you."

Beetle took Elvira's hand and smiled at Aunt Agatha.

"Elvira and I," he said succinctly, "have been to the City Hall. There a brief but touching service was performed which made One where once had been Two. In short, Elvira and I were married this morning. With both of us it was love at first sight."

With a sad bow he turned to Duncan.

"As much as I regret the necessity," he said, "I must ask you to accept my resignation."

"Elvira!" Aunt Agatha shrieked. "It isn't true. It can't be true."

"But it is," Elvira said dreamily. "It was love at first sight—just like Beetle says—He's wonderful!"

DUNCAN leaned back against his pillow with a contented sigh. Things couldn't be better. Not in a million years. This removed for all time the menace of Elvira, and it probably would have an excellent effect on his aunt. It would prove to her the inadvisability of amateur match-making.

A half hour later Beetle said goodbye to Duncan. Aunt Agatha was in her room with a bottle of smelling salts, prostrated.

"Is there anything I can do before I leave?" Beetle asked.

"Not a thing," Duncan said. "Oh, there is something at that." He dug into the covers of his bed and pulled out the ragged, scorched doll. "This blamed thing has still got me worried. I might lose it again. I'm not the responsible type, you know. So I wish you'd keep it for me. With you it will be safe and I'll have a little peace of mind."

"Certainly, sir." Beetle took the doll and put it carefully in his pocket. "I shall keep it close to me always. Goodbye, sir."

Duncan watched him leave with regret. Good man, Beetle, hard to find another like him. He felt relieved that Beetle had the custody of that damned doll. Beetle wasn't the type to shirk a responsibility like that. If he said he'd keep it with him, he'd keep it with him. All the time.

That night Duncan woke from a sound sleep with a start. For a moment he was at a loss to determine what had awakened him. His face felt hot and flushed. It was a most peculiar and disturbing sensation.

He switched on the light and picked up the hand mirror from his night table. For an instant he couldn't believe his eyes. *He was blushing!*

Then as understanding dawned on him he chuckled to himself and flicked off the light. After all, Beetle was just sticking to his word. Good fellow, Beetle.

Anyway, honeymoons didn't last forever.

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Hokum Hotel

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

The manager was wroth. "Get those creatures out of here!"

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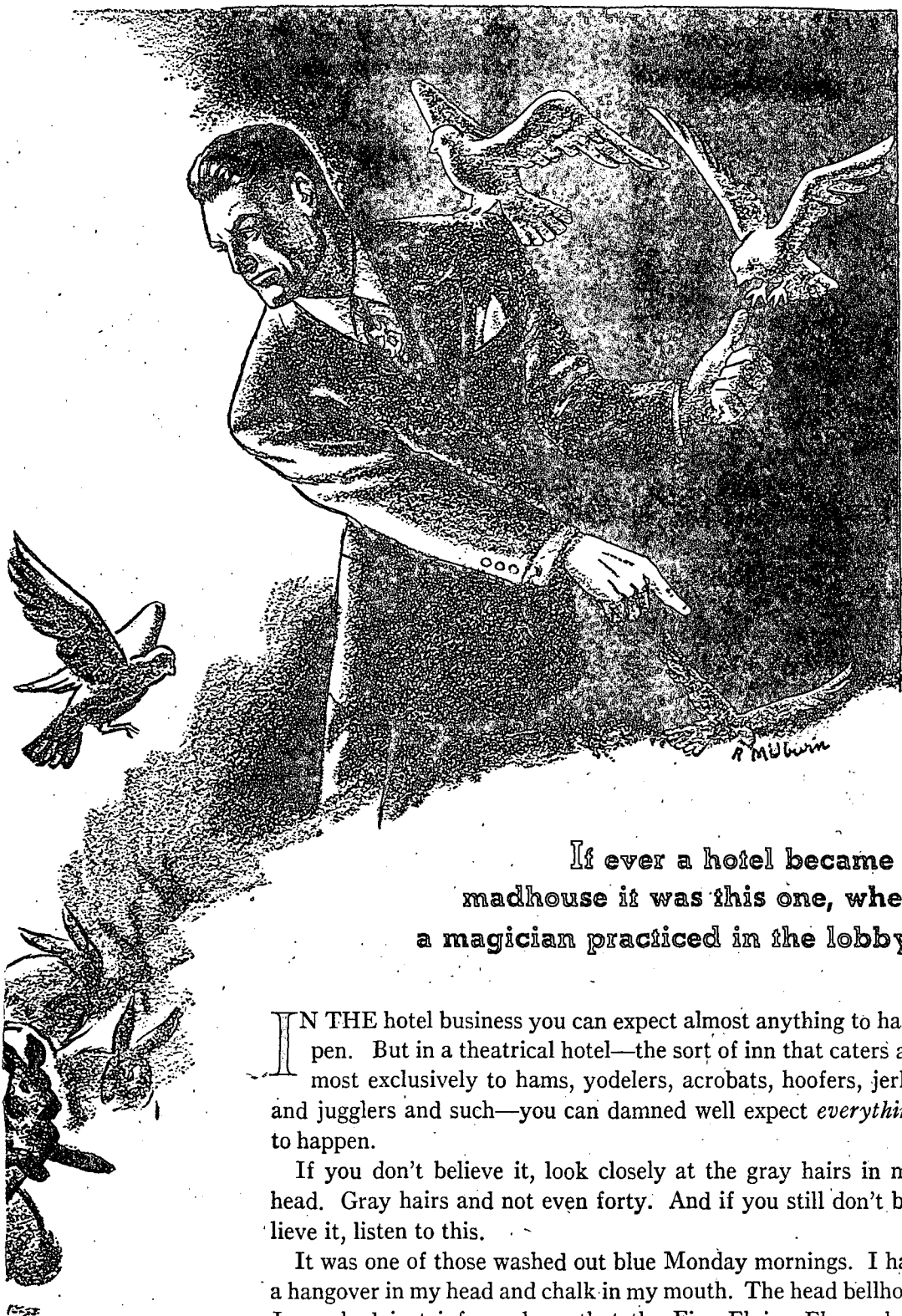

If ever a hotel became a madhouse it was this one, when a magician practiced in the lobby!

IN THE hotel business you can expect almost anything to happen. But in a theatrical hotel—the sort of inn that caters almost exclusively to hams, yodelers, acrobats, hoofers, jerks and jugglers and such—you can damned well expect *everything* to happen.

If you don't believe it, look closely at the gray hairs in my head. Gray hairs and not even forty. And if you still don't believe it, listen to this.

It was one of those washed out blue Monday mornings. I had a hangover in my head and chalk in my mouth. The head bellhop, Jerry, had just informed me that the Five Flying Flynns had checked out during the wee morning hours without bothering to

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stop at the desk and notify me of that fact.

It seemed that they had made their departure down the fire escape and hadn't left anything behind in their suite. Not even the two months rent they owed me.

And around nine o'clock Mrs. Donovan had called to tell me a prospective buyer would arrive in town that afternoon. She was very excited and pleased and hopeful. Now is as good a time as any to explain that Mrs. Donovan is the sweet little old lady who, as owner of the Hotel Harmony, was my boss.

Manager was my title at the Hotel Harmony. I was also day clerk at the desk, which had been my title when old Steve Donovan had been living and was owner-manager of the Harmony. He'd been dead ten years now, and his widow had inherited the Hotel Harmony and the headache and debts that came with it.

Mrs. Donovan lived in a little bungalow in the suburbs and was just able to get along on the income from the Harmony each month. So naturally she was excited when she called. The sale of the dump would be a God-send to her.

"He's going to stay tonight and tomorrow," Mrs. Donovan told me. "Give him the finest of everything, Pete. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if he bought it?" She meant the prospective buyer.

"It would be swell, Mrs. Donovan," I agreed. "We'll see that everything is at its best. Don't worry. What did you say his name is?"

"Mr. Buttle," she said. "You'd better write it down."

I wrote it down, then, mentally hoping that a guy who'd been silly enough to keep a name like that all his life would probably be dumb enough to buy the Harmony.

For even though I'd started in the Hotel Harmony over twenty years back, and worked and lived in it ever since, I knew I'd be just as glad as old Mrs. Donovan to get away from it.

For I could have been working for more money in a much more highly rated hostelry. I could have been making almost twice what I was making at Hotel Harmony if I accepted any one of the plenty of offers I'd had from better inns.

Then why was I at the Hotel Harmony? Well, maybe because of my loyalty to old Mrs. Donovan. Maybe because I knew any other guy she might bring in as manager would soon swindle her out of it. Maybe because I knew that as long as she had the Harmony on her hands she'd need yours truly to handle it for her.

So don't think *I* didn't have my fingers crossed in the hope that this guy Buttle she'd interested wouldn't back out on us.

That reason, plus the previously mentioned blue Monday and heavy hangover, might account for the edginess I felt. Edginess that broke into a rash when I saw the gray mustached old gent swagger into the lobby in advance of a caravan of four bellhops who were buried beneath trunks and luggage.

THE gray mustached old gent looked like one of those summer gin advertisements you see of old southern plantation gentlemen swilling mint drinks on sunny verandas. His face was red, his eyebrows as gray and bushy as his mustache, and the expected paunch protruded behind the visible areas of a white vest across which dangled a heavy gold watch chain.

He carried a cane with practiced ease, and twirled it importantly as he

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approached the desk.

"Haffmmmmph!" He sounded his opening salvo about three feet away.

I raised my eyebrows noncomittally. "Yes, sir?"

"Have you rooms?" the mustached old gent demanded.

"How many, sir?" I continued my noncomittal act.

"A suite of ahhhh, four would be suitable for the present," the old duck said.

I was trying to size him up. He was too damned grandiose to ring true. Not the ham of the theater, but the plush of the con man, if you know what I mean.

"You have reservations, sir?" I asked, stalling. That remark usually brings the best of them down a notch. But not this old guy.

"My name is Colonel Applegate," he said, as if that were enough to command the royal suite in the Waldorf.

I pretended to think deeply. Of course, all I had in mind was the tenth floor suite just deserted by the Flying Flynns.

"There is a four room suite on the tenth," I said finally. "If you don't mind waiting several hours until we put it in readiness."

Colonel Applegate shook his head. "No. Not a bit. Give me time to have luncheon and all that."

I pushed the register over to him. "You will sign here," I said.

Colonel Applegate signed with flowing Spencerian flourish. Then he signed another name below it, and put the pen down. I turned the register around.

"Who is Mr. Joe Jobe?" I asked. "You valet?"

Colonel Applegate stiffened. "Mr. Joe Jobe is, or will soon be, known professionally as Hoako The Hindu. I am his manager. He is the world's greatest exponent of the mystic arts."

"I see," I nodded, looking around the lobby, "and he will arrive later?"

"He is at the moment purchasing a turban and other necessary items," declared the colonel. "When I return in several hours he will be with me."

I nodded again, trying to figure this out. The old colonel looked no more like a magician's manager than he did a bellhop.

"This *is*, ahhhh, a theatrical hotel, is it not?" the colonel asked.

"Yes," I acknowledged, "this is." That clinched my observation. Anyone in show business knows the theatrical hotels of the circuits.

"I, ahhh, imagine that in your position as manager of this hotel you become well acquainted with matters theatrical," the colonel went on.

"Sure," I said. "What would you like to know?"

"I am rather new to this line of business," Colonel Applegate explained. "Previously, I owned a small but, ahhh, very lucrative factory. Damned priority nonsense put me out of business. Got out before I lost my shirt, however. It was fortune that led to my discovery of Mr. Joe Jobe, ahhh, the new Hoako the Hindu."

"I see," I said.

"Took the chap under my wing," the colonel said. "Remarkable psychic phenomena, this Joe Jobe. I decided to back him, to exploit it, so to speak. Figured there would be money in it for both of us in the, ahhh, theater."

"But you haven't played anywhere as yet?" I asked. "That is, your Hoako the Hindu has yet to appear on the stage?"

Colonel Applegate nodded. "Precisely. We are just, ahhh, launching his career, so to speak. Have you any suggestions?"

"You worked out an act yet?"

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The colonel nodded again. "Yes indeed. All we need now is a start, a theater, patrons at the box office, and all that."

"You might get in touch with some of the better agents," I said. "Let them catch his act. If he's all you say, they'll book a straight run for him."

"Ahhhh, yes," said the Colonel. "I see. Precisely. Capital idea. Agents, eh?"

I got a small piece of paper, scribbled several names and addresses on it, and handed it to the colonel.

"These are the names of some pretty fair ten percenters," I said. "You might begin by trying them."

The colonel looked at the slip. "Thank you," he said. "Very decent of you."

"Not at all," I answered. "Your rental for the suite on the tenth floor will be thirty-five dollars for the week, payable in advance."

The colonel nodded, reached into his pocket and pulled out a wallet bursting with green stuff. Carelessly, he pulled out a twenty, a ten, and a five.

Bug-eyed, I took the money and scratched him out a receipt. If he was a four flusher, his wallet didn't show it. Later, I was going to regret deeply having taken that dough . . .

THE prospective buyer, Mr. J. B. Buttle arrived a little after two o'clock that afternoon. I spotted him the instant he came through the revolving door and into the lobby. He was short, fat, bald-headed and beaming. And even the camel's hair sportcoat he wore couldn't keep him from looking like Tweedledum.

I slammed the desk bell so hard in my excitement, that five bellhops leaped to their feet at once and swarmed across the lobby toward him. I was wearing my biggest, friendliest, most professional grin as he came over to the desk.

"Yes, *sir!*" I said brightly. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Mr. Buttle looked startled, then pleased. Obviously he wasn't used to such attention.

"I would like to register for a room," said Mr. Buttle.

"Certainly, sir," I beamed. "A suite or a single?"

"A single," said Mr. Buttle. "A single with bath, of course."

I shoved the register under his nose. "We have an excellent single on the tenth floor. Southern exposure. Modern, comfortable—our best."

Mr. Buttle smiled. He picked up a pen and scratched his name on the guest register. I turned it around.

"Thank you, Mr. Bu—" I stopped.

The name scrawled on the register was not Buttle. It was John Smith. For a split second I was stumped. An alias—but of course. He was here to look the place over incognito. He didn't want me to know he was Buttle, the prospective buyer. He wanted to test our service, hospitality, facilities, and such.

I looked up at Mr. Buttle's round, smiling face. There was no mistaking him. Twenty years in the hotel game had made it tough to fool me. Naturally, I didn't let on that I knew his game.

We knew he was Mr. Buttle. Even though he didn't know we knew.

"Thank you, Mr. Smith," I said smilingly. "Don't hesitate to let me know if there's anything further we can do to make your stay here pleasant."

Mr. Buttle, alias Smith, nodded happily and was off, followed by two bellhops carrying his expensive calfskin luggage.

Watching our prospective buyer step into the elevator, I had to smile. This

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was fine. This was excellent. I'd lavish him with care and attention. I'd make his head swim with hospitality. And all the time he'd never know that I was aware of the fact that he was really Mr. Buttle.

I tapped the desk bell, and Jerry, the bell captain, came trotting up.

"See that gentleman who just stepped into the elevator, Jerry?" I asked.

Jerry nodded.

"He's to have extra special attention, Jerry," I explained. "Cater to his slightest whim. Bury him under a heap of hospitality. Understand?"

"What's his name?" Jerry asked.

"Mr. John Smith," I said. "Room 1020."

Jerry's eyebrows went up, but he nodded. It was plain to him that I wasn't offering any further information, but he was hotel-wise enough to know orders were orders.

Then I went back to work, clearing up mailing and billing lists for the day. About an hour after that, I took time off to telephone Mrs. Donovan.

"He's here, Mrs. Donovan," I told her. "And I've got the situation well in hand. Just sit back and relax. You'll have the place sold by this time tomorrow morning."

"Oh, I'm glad, Pete," she said. "That's wonderful. I know I can count on you. Really, Pete, I don't know what I would have done these ten years if it hadn't been for your—"

I cut her off. "Awww," I said, "skip it, Mrs. Donovan. Any manager would have done the same." This wasn't the truth, but then I was full of becoming modesty.

"I told him," said Mrs. Donovan, "to make the sale arrangements with you, as soon as he'd made up his mind. I know you'll be better at driving a good bargain than I am."

"Just leave it to me," I promised. "Leave everything to me!"

I am always very good at promising things . . .

IT WAS a little after noon when Mr. Buttle—alias Smith—came down into the lobby again. Evidently Jerry and the other bellhops had been carrying out instructions to the hilt, for he looked as contented as a prize winning bovine at a stock show.

I beamed at him, and he came across to my desk.

"I must say that your hotel extends itself for visitors," Mr. Buttle smiled.

I was still beaming. "We just try to please, Mr. B—, Smith. Every guest is a special guest to us. It's always been that way. Perhaps that's why we have such a steady patronage. We like to feel that our guests always return." No time like the present to put in a plug, I figured.

"I was thinking of luncheon," Mr. Buttle said. "Could you direct me to a good restaurant?"

This was made to order. "Why, we have a restaurant right here in the Hotel Harmony," I said. "One of the very best, if I do say so. I can advise you, with confidence, to try our dining accommodations."

Mr. Buttle rubbed his bald head delightedly. "How convenient," he said. "I most certainly shall try your restaurant." He paused. "Ahh, would you care to dine with me, if you haven't already had lunch, I mean?"

Inside, I grinned. This was obvious. Along with his incognito inspection, he wanted to gain my confidence, and possibly get some inside lowdown on the Hotel Harmony. But this was right up my alley.

"Gladly," I told him. "But I hope you'll be my guest."

Mr. Buttle's eyebrows went up a

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notch in pleased surprise. "I must say this is certainly a right friendly hotel," he said.

I gave him a big, warm grin. "You have no idea," I said . . .

OUR dining room wasn't the most lavish set-up in the hotel world. But it was clean enough, and our cooks were slightly better than average. Catering to a theatrical trade, they had to be pretty good.

I took Mr. Buttle to a corner table by a window looking out over the street. The place was moderately crowded, for which I thanked God, and I made the most out of the second rate theatrical fry scattered around the tables.

"That woman over there," I said, pointing to a henna-haired, wrinkle-necked old doll in another corner, "is Madame Traladeay. She's in opera. Of course you've heard of her."

Mr. Buttle gazed until his button eyes threatened to drop on the tablecloth. Clearly, I was on the right track. And his next comment was proof of it.

"I've always been crazy about the theater, since I was a kid," Mr. Buttle said. "Course, I never was on the stage. Went into business. But I've always admired theatrical people. And it's sure interesting to have you point out celebrities, even if I haven't heard of 'em all."

I smiled, not mentioning the fact that he wasn't the only one who'd never heard of Madame Traladeay. She sang in the mass chorus numbers.

"And that couple over there," I said, pointing to a slick-haired boy and a platinum blonde, "are the famous dance team, the DeLooses."

Mr. Buttle's eye bulged again, and I didn't mention that the DeLooses weren't working at the moment and were a mere three weeks back in their rent.

Mr. Buttle's eyes bugged, and suddenly pointing a finger at the door, "are those two coming in now?"

I looked up, recognizing the portly, moustached figure of Colonel Applegate. Walking beside him was a thin pasty faced, scrawny little man with large, luminous brown eyes and a turban.

It took a minute for me to answer, for I was wrapped up in a quick estimate of the turbaned little egg who was undoubtedly Colonel Applegate's Joe Jobe, or Hoako the Hindu.

"Ohhh, yes," I answered. "They just registered this morning. An interesting pair." And then I told him about the colonel and his pint sized magician.

Mr. Buttle was but briefly interested. And I got the idea that his lack of enthusiasm over the pair was due to the fact that I'd inadvertently disclosed them as beginners in the theatrical trade. Obviously, he wanted to be pointed out the veterans, even if he didn't know them.

Obligingly, I went back to picking out others in the dining room who were a little more familiar with the grease paint and footlight routines. His interest picked up again immediately.

And as I chattered on, I waved to Louie, the headwaiter, who'd been standing in the corner giving a sleepy bus boy hell. I figured we'd better start ordering, for I couldn't go on building up the small fry theatrical patrons indefinitely.

Louie caught my wave, nodded, and started toward our table. Just before he passed the table where Colonel Applegate and his queer looking little magician were sitting, he picked up a couple of menus from a stand.

I turned back to Mr. Buttle, then,

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to make an opening remark about the cuisine which would steer him to the most passable dishes of the restaurant.

But Buttle wasn't in any mood to listen. His eyes were bugged out twice as far as they'd been when staring at the slightly tarnished theatrical stars I'd pointed out for him. And he was looking in the direction from which Louie, the headwaiter *should* have been coming.

I looked too. But I didn't see Louie.

Instead I saw a pair of menus—*floating through the air at us!*

I blinked once, then twice. My mouth must have been as wide open as a fish on land.

The menus were still floating through the air toward us!

Mr. Buttle was trying to speak.

"It, it, I mean he, was holding the menus. Now he's gone. But the menus are still coming!" Mr. Buttle managed to croak in horror.

This was the truth. The menus were still coming at us. And now they paused, hovering in the air, less than two feet from our table while Louie's voice said:

"Sirs, what will you have?"

LOUIE'S voice said that, and the menus suddenly separated, one hovering in front of Mr. Buttle and the other in front of me!

And then Louie's voice, bewilderedly, declared:

"What is the trouble? Is something wrong?"

Was something wrong! A pair of floating menus, and a voice without a body. Was something wrong!

"Louie," I rasped. "Don't be funny; where are you?"

"*Am* I?" Louie's voice protested even more bewilderedly. "Why, I'm right here in front of the table!"

Mr. Buttle was hastily scrambling to his feet, pushing his fat little paunch frantically away from the table. His face was ashen in horror.

He started around the table, then, and was suddenly halted abruptly, as if by an invisible force.

"Please, sir," Louie's voice declared. "Is there something wrong? Is there some trouble?"

Mr. Buttle let out a shriek, and backed hastily away.

"It *touched* me!" he yelped. "It put its hand on my arm to stop me!"

And then, yelling at the top of his lungs, Mr. Buttle backed around the other side of the table and streaked for the door.

I started out right after him, thinking only of the horrible fact that this would be a hell of an exit for our prospective buyer.

And then a hand detained me by grabbing my arm. A hand I couldn't see. A hand I could only feel!

"What's wrong?" Louie's voice, croakingly, pleadingly, came less than two feet from my ear.

I shut my eyes tight against any sanity that might come over me. Shut my eyes tight and pushed hard against the body of the hand I couldn't see. The body which was there, all right, but which was also invisible.

"One side," I yelled. "I'll come back and faint later!"

Then I was dashing out into the lobby of the hotel. Looking wildly right and left for some sign of the fleeing Mr. Buttle. I caught sight of the worried face of Jerry, the bell captain.

"Buttle," I yelled. "Which way did he go?"

"Buttle?" Jerry frowned.

Then I remembered. Jerry didn't know.

"I mean Mr. Smith. Which way did he go?" I explained.

Jerry pointed to the revolving doors at the front entrance.

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I was across the lobby and starting to step through the doors in less than three seconds. And then, almost simultaneous to my stepping into the revolving apparatus, a huge, enormous creature, undoubtedly some three hundred and fifty pounds in weight, started through the same revolving doors from the street entrance.

We jammed there, as his bulk clogged the whirling panels to an almost complete standstill.

And then, cursing, I recognized the enormous tub as Thumpo, a guest at the hotel, who was currently appearing in a sideshow with an indoor circus on Seventy-Fourth street.

I continued to curse as slowly, laboriously, the big bulk of Thumpo, the sideshow fat man, pressed inexorably through the revolving door. It took exactly one minute and forty-five seconds.

And when I dashed out onto the sidewalk in front of the Hotel Harmony, there was no sight of Mr. Buttle.

It would be the height of understatement to say that I was sickly disgusted as I walked slowly back into the lobby.

In an hour, two maybe, there would undoubtedly be a call from Mr. Buttle. A call advising me to send his baggage on to another hotel.

And there would be no unloading of the Hotel Harmony on our now badly frightened prospect. No unloading of the Harmony, and more grief for old, sweet Mrs. Donovan. Plus the fact, I reminded myself, that I'd be stuck at the Harmony until I smiled at guests through a gray beard.

I was so damned sick inside that I didn't even realize my footsteps carried me back into the restaurant. So utterly dejected that I even forgot about the Louie phenomena until I saw him.

Yes, I do mean "saw" him. Louie, the headwaiter, of course!

For there he was, puzzled, perplexed, and big as life, watching me come back into the restaurant.

I stopped short when I caught sight of him. Stopped short and remembered what had happened scant minutes before.

"Looooie," I gurgled. "My God, Louie!"

"What happened?" Louie demanded shakily. "What on earth happened?"

I advanced cautiously toward him. "You're asking me?" I demanded shrilly, as the awful implications on what *had* happened tugged at the sleeve of my brain.

"Yeah," Louie stuck to his guns of confusion. "I'm asking you. I come up with your menus and you and your friend starting acting crazy mad. What was it, a gag?"

"Look," I said sharply. "I had a hangover, and maybe I still got it. But it wasn't the deetees that made you disappear, become invisible, before me very eyes."

Louie drew in his breath sharply. "Are you all right?" he asked solicitously.

"And Mr. Buttle saw you, too," I said hotly. "Or didn't see you, whichever way you like it!"

"Look," said Louie, "maybe your friend had a hangover, too. Maybe the two of you were out too late and too stinko last night, huh?"

I STARTED to get hot under the collar. No one can become invisible before my eyes and then deny it.

And then a voice boomed behind me, and I turned to see the portly, smiling bulk of Colonel Applegate.

"Really, old chap," he said. "We must apologize."

I frowned, getting still hotter. "For what?"

"For the trick my man, Hoako the

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Hindu, pulled on your headwaiter here," Colonel Applegate said.

"Hoako the Hindu?" I squealed.

Colonel Applegate was smilingly affable. "But, ahhh, of course. He was just practicing, sort of unthinkingly. He threw a cloak of invisibility over your headwaiter as he was passing our table."

"He *what*?" I screamed.

"He was just practicing," Colonel Applegate said. "Just brushing up on his invisibility trick, doncha see?"

The thin, scrawny, turbaned little figure of Joe Jobe, or Hoako the Hindu, appeared at the Colonel's elbow.

"Sure," he said. "Excuse me. I was just practicing."

A great light was beginning to dawn on the flushed face of Louie, the headwaiter.

"You mean I was invisible when I went up to that table?" he yelped.

Joe Jobe, alias Hoako the Hindu, nodded solemnly.

"But of course," declared the colonel.

I didn't say a word. The damn foolishness of the situation, the utter impossibility of it all, was just beginning to occur to me.

"This is all some damned rib. Someone's pulling my leg!" Louie growled, suddenly suspicious.

I looked at Louie and the colonel and Hoako the Hindu.

"You three think you cooked up a good joke," I said. "I don't know how you did it, but it stank. I'm warning you, all three of you, to keep out of my hair in the future. I'm not saying anything more!"

I was boiling inside as I turned away. Boiling and getting sick again. For their damned fool practical joke had driven Mr. Buttle, our prospect, far, far away. Further than I cared to think about.

When I passed the desk in the lobby, the assistant I'd placed there, called out:

"Mrs. Donovan telephoned. She wants you to call her."

The sickness got worse. "Tell her," I said, "that I'm still out. Tell her you don't know where I am."

I couldn't bear the thought of having to tell the little old lady that I'd nixed her prospect and ruined her chance at a secure old age in a little less than thirty minutes. I was going up to my room. I was going to put towels on my aching head. I was going to think.

Then, maybe, after a little while I'd be able to get up courage enough to telephone old Mrs. Donovan and break the bad news to her.

But half an hour wearing a groove in the rug of my room didn't help at all. I threw the cold towels off my aching head and slammed out of the room determined to find my way to the nearest bar and possible alcoholic refuge.

HOWEVER, I didn't get any farther than the lobby. In fact I was halfway across it, headed for the door, when I stopped dead in my tracks.

For Mr. Buttle had just stepped through the entrance!

Mr. Buttle wasn't beaming, but there was a tremulous effort at a smile on his round little face, and his composure seemed to have returned.

He saw me, then, and came directly over.

"I, I, just want to apologize," Mr. Buttle said earnestly.

It was all I could do to keep from fainting.

"Apologize?" I croaked.

Mr. Buttle nodded rapidly. "Yes," he admitted. "I guess I sort of acted like a fool, didn't I?"

I was too busy getting a grip on myself to answer that one.

"I, I mean," said Mr. Buttle, "run-

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ning out screaming like that." He paused. "I, I guess I'm not a trouper," he said.

"Trouper?" I gasped.

Mr. Buttle nodded more earnestly. "Yes. I guess I got scared out of my wits by that show stunt." He blushed. "For a person as crazy about the theater as I am, that was certainly terrible, wasn't it?"

I nodded weakly. "Forget it."

"No," said Mr. Buttle. "I'll never forget it. I must have looked pretty silly. Imagine—thinking there was someone invisible present!"

"Yes," I agreed uncertainly, "imagine that."

Mr. Buttle laughed. "Someone invisible," he repeated self-scornfully. "Why, that's impossible. You'll have to forgive me. I know so little about show business. I didn't realize it was a stunt."

I tried a hearty chuckle. My knees were watery with relief.

"Think nothing of it," I said. "Ha, hah, hah."

"Ha, hah, hah," Mr. Buttle echoed.

Mr. Buttle wiped the perspiration from his bald dome.

"Boy," he said, "I must say it was certainly a shock."

"That's a fact," I agreed. "I think it would be a good idea if you had a drink. Like to join me?"

Mr. Buttle beamed. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you, very much. Do you have a bar in the Hotel Harmony, too?"

I shook my head. "There's one right around the corner, though. One that's very excellent."

From the corner of my eye I caught sight of Colonel Applegate and his pint sized magician, Joe Jobe, now Hoako the Hindu. They had just sighted us, and were moving in our direction. I grabbed Mr. Buttle's arm, turning him toward the door, and hastily piloted him toward it . . .

MY CHUM Mr. Buttle and I not only had *one* drink, we had *ten* each after that. Ten drinks apiece in a little over an hour and a half. And I don't mind admitting that my gait was a trifle unsteady when we left the bar at last.

Mr. Buttle, however, hadn't been the babbling type of drinker. He was a trifle tight by the tenth drink, of course, and my subtle sales talk seemed to have had a pretty good effect on him. However, he hadn't admitted to being anyone but the alias under which he had registered, John Smith. And when we went back to the Hotel Harmony, he was under better control when we entered the lobby than I was.

In fact, he spotted the pint parcel magician, Hoako the Hindu, before I did.

"Look," Mr. Buttle exclaimed in awe, grabbing my arm and extending a slightly unsteady finger. "Look at that!"

It took an instant for my eyes to focus, and another for me to follow Mr. Buttle's waveringly pointing finger.

I saw the rope before I saw Hoako the half-pint Hindu.

The rope rose straight up from the floor in the center of the lobby. It rose straight up and stopped some five feet short of the rather high lobby ceiling.

It didn't seem fastened to anything.

And yet it stood as rigidly as a pole.

And there was a crowd, maybe ten or twelve people, grouped in a circle at the base of the strangely erect rope, while, from the center of that group, right next to the rope, I caught the flash of the turban of Hoako the Hindu, alias Joe Jobe.

"I, I, really do believe that we are aboush to witsnesh the Hindu Rope

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Trick!" exclaimed Mr. Buttle, profoundly excited.

Sobriety was coming back to me. Coming back in a hurry. Theatrical hotel or not, the Harmony didn't tolerate acts in the lobby. It was a long standing policy, and I didn't intend to have it violated now. Even if a pseudo-professional magician wanted to practice.

I started for the crowd around the foot of the weirdly stationary rope. Mr. Buttle, babbling excitedly, was at my heels.

I pushed my way through the ring of spectators to confront Hoako the Hindu.

"What's going on here?" I demanded.

The turbaned little guy looked somberly up at me. "I am just brushing up on a trick," he said.

I looked up the strangely stationary rope. It was all of fifteen to twenty feet high.

"This is no place for tricks," I said. "You rented the suite on the tenth, not the lobby."

"It's too small," Joe Jobe, also Hoako the Hindu, declared.

"Then rent the Roxy," I said. "But get your damned rope trick out of this lobby!"

Mr. Buttle was plucking at my sleeve then, and I turned to see his round anxious face staring up imploringly at mine.

"Let him work his trick," Mr. Buttle begged. "I've never seen it done."

I hesitated. After all, Mr. Buttle was our prospective buyer. I had almost lost him once. There was no sense in crossing him now. I decided to make him happy.

"Okay," I told the turbaned little guy, "do your trick. But make it snappy, understand?"

Hoako the Hindu's large, luminous, sorrowful brown eyes looked around the crowd. He spotted a breathless little lad of about ten in his audience.

"You know how to climb, sonny?"

"Oh, Boy," exclaimed the youngster. "Kin I climb. Try me and see how good I can climb!" The kid dashed to the peanut magician's side.

And then, before I could think fast enough to do anything about preventing it, the kid was shinnying up the stationary rope toward the ceiling!

I watched him climb higher and higher, while Hoako the Hindu looked up, arms outstretched toward the boy, fingers working as if running a scale on an invisible piano.

"Abracadabra," muttered Joe Jobe soulfully, trying to look as Hindustanish as his stage name. "Abracadabra, baba, slabah!"

It happened just as the youngster reached the top of the rope, just as if it looked as the only thing left for him to do would be to climb down again.

There was a brilliant puff of smoke, completely concealing the kid. And when the smoke cleared an instant later —*the kid was gone!*

I SHOOK my head in astonishment. Right up the rope to the top and then—gone.

A shrill scream suddenly sounded behind my ear.

"Bobby! Bobby! My God—what did you do to my boy?"

The scream was feminine, and I needed no instinct to tell me it came from a mother in anguish.

Then a fat, red-faced, frightened woman was pushing through the circle around the rope which Hoako the Hindu, alias Joe Jobe, was now complacently taking down.

"My boy," the woman screamed. "My little Bobby. My darling child. You sent him up that rope! Where is

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he? Where IS he?"

She sailed into the mite of a magician with all fists flailing, screaming shrilly still.

Hoako the Hindu ducked into the crowd, and very skillfully got himself out of harm's length. The yowling mother, no longer able to see him, turned wailingly to a bystander.

"Where's the manager?" she yelled.

Someone pointed at me.

And just like that, the outraged picture of militant motherhood was bearing wrathfully down on me.

"Give me my Bobby!" she shrilled. "Give me my Bobby, you murderer. I'll sue you. I'll sue this hotel. You let a strange little boy wander into your lobby and go up a rope into thin air. You've killed him!"

A quick sidelong glance told me instantly that the enraged mother wasn't my only problem. Mr. Buttle had paled considerably, and now looked just as about as ready to flee as he had a while back in the restaurant.

"Police! PolEEEEEEEEEce!" the woman began to yell violently.

"Oh, my," Mr. Buttle gasped. "Oh, my goodness!"

"Don't you think you better go up to your room?" I suggested desperately to my prospective buyer. "I'll handle this, rest assured."

Mr. Buttle nodded whitely, scurrying out and around the crowd that had now gathered, heading toward the elevators. I stuck out my arm to ward off the avalanche of maniacal motherhood bearing down on me.

"Madam!" I yelled as commandingly as I could. "Madam—please calm down!"

I might as well have been a matador yelling those words at an enraged bull. The irate dame was swarming all over me inside of another two seconds. I remember going down under the several hundred pounds she undoubtedly weighed. And I remember her big red, steamy fists pounding lumps on my noggin, and remember, too, wondering if I should hit a lady who wasn't a lady.

And then her weight was being pulled off of me. Pulled off of me while a deep, thundering voice demanded to know what in the hell was going on around here.

I looked up to see the bulk of two, blue uniformed coppers.

And climbing unsteadily to my feet, I recognized the biggest and bulkiest of the pair as Steve Clancy, officer of the beat on which Hotel Harmony was located.

Clancy was holding hard to the weighty and threshing woman. And though Clancy was a big man, and one of the toughest coppers on the force, he had his hands full at the moment.

"What goes on, Pete?" he thundered at me. "What's this she devil breaking up your lobby for?"

I mentally thanked God that Clancy and I were on the best of cordial terms. And I did some fast thinking in preparing my answer, when suddenly I spotted Hoako the Hindu coming back to the circle. He had the ten year old youngster with him!

"Nothing," I said swiftly. "This poor woman thinks her little kid came in here to climb up a rope and disappear."

Then I pointed toward Hoako the Hindu and the white-faced tyke beside him.

"Is that your youngster, madam?"

The big woman stopped struggling. Her eyes lighted.

"Bobby," she yelled, "my boy!"

Clancy released her, and she rushed to the little kid, swamping him in beefy affection.

I gave Clancy a knowing look. "Better steer her out gently, Steve," I ad-

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Suddenly the kid disappeared in a puff of smoke

vised. "I think she's had a little too much to drink."

Clancy's expression became righteously indignant. "A mither who'd drink with a fine little kid like that, oughtta be—" he punctuated his remark by starting toward the woman and her boy.

"Be gentle," I called after him remindingly, " 'cause she thinks he ran up a rope in here and disappeared."

Clancy nodded knowingly. "I will that," he said, "fer the sake of her tyke."

WHILE Clancy and the other copper gently but firmly steered the previously hell-bent woman out of the Harmony's lobby with her child, I set out in the direction of Hoako the Hindu, who'd started for the elevators after he brought the kid back.

"Hey, you," I yelled.

The pint sized magician turned around. He looked suspiciously at me from those sorrowful brown eyes.

"I want to talk to you," I said, catching up with him.

Hoako the Hindu nodded noncommittally.

"Look," I said. "I'll have to get this straight. I don't want any more of your impromptu rehearsals in the pub-

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lic sections of this hotel. Do I make myself clear?"

"The colonel," said Hoako the Hindu mildly, "told me I should practice. I gotta brush up on things."

"I'll speak personally to Colonel Applegate," I said. "But in the meantime, you lay off. Get me?" If my voice was hot and harsh it was probably because I was thinking of Mr. Buttle up in his room at that very moment, thinking things over much too much, and quite probably deciding that hotels were things to keep your money out of.

Hoako the Hindu shrugged.

"You talk to the colonel," he said. "He left me orders what I should practice."

"Where is he?" I demanded hotly.

Hoako the Hindu shrugged. "Out somewheres signing up my act, I suppose."

"Where did that kid hide?" I demanded suddenly.

"Hide?" Hoako the Hindu blinked uncomprehendingly. "Hide? Why, he didn't hide. I made him disappear. Just like I made that headwaiter invisible."

I really got sore.

"Who in the hell do you think you're kidding?" I yelled. "You have a good routine, I'll admit it. But don't give me any of that Hindu hokum. I'm no paying customer."

Hoako the Hindu looked at me guilelessly. He shrugged.

"You talk to the colonel," he said. Then he turned away and stepped into an elevator.

Fuming, I went back to the desk and took over from my assistant. Half an hour later, I was still burning, still worrying, and still wondering what Mr. Buttle's reaction to the second messy scene had been.

And five minutes after that, I got my chance to talk to Colonel Applegate. He swept in through the revolving doors like a duke on his way to Parliament. He was carrying his cane, and twirling it happily as he sauntered over to the desk.

"Ahhhhhh," he opened beamingly, "and how are you, sir?"

"Rotten," I snapped. "And I have some words I want to say to y—"

"Ahhhhh, yes," the colonel said, peeling a pearl gray kid glove from his right hand, "about the agents you recommended. I had only to see three. I have booked our act at, ahhh, a modest starting price. A three week starter, with an increase proportionate to our value if we're kept on. We open the night after tomorrow."

"That is all very fine," I said sourly, "but doesn't concern the talk I want to have with you a bit."

The colonel raised white, aristocratically tufted eyebrows in faintly nettled annoyance.

"You refer, I presume, to l'affair invisibility of this noon?" he asked frostily.

"Only in part," I said grimly. "That was bad enough, but you missed your magical mite's very messy rope stunt just half an hour ago."

The colonel looked disturbed. "Messy? You mean Hoako the Hindu messed up the rope trick?"

I GOT hotter. "I mean he messed up the lobby with it, almost lost a woman her child, and almost lost me my front teeth!"

The colonel smiled in relief. "Hah, glad to know it worked. Had me worried for a moment. Thought he might be slipping. That rope trick is one of his best."

My blood vessels must have started bulging dangerously then.

"You and your damned faker!" I screamed. "Is that all you think mat-

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ters around here? We aren't running this place as an exhibition hall for a clever magician."

Colonel Applegate raised his eyebrows indignantly. "My good man," he said. "Permit me to correct you. Hoako the Hindu is most certainly no mere magician. He is actually a wizard. You thought the invisibility thing was some trick. It was most certainly nothing of the sort. Your headwaiter was *actually* invisible when Hoako turned his concentration on him. The child you speak of *actually* disappeared into thin air at the top of that rope. Hoako is no magician. He is a modern throwback to the ancient wizards of past ages!"

This *was* more than I could stand.

"Then why don't the two of you get the hell onto your brooms and ride out of this hotel?" I yelled.

"We have paid," the colonel reminded me in frosty indignation, "a week in advance. You have accepted our money. We will remain here until the week has expired!"

With that as an exit line, the colonel turned his back on me and stamped off toward the elevators. At a boiling point of helpless rage, I stalked back behind the desk.

And then the telephone at my elbow rang.

Automatically, I grabbed the instrument from the cradle. Irately, I barked into it.

"Hello?"

Mrs. Donovan's voice came to me!

"Hello, is this Pete?" she asked.

I gulped once, twice, and felt sick all over again.

"Why, uh, yes, Mrs. Donovan. How's everything?"

"You sound strange, Pete," the little old lady said worriedly. "Is there any trouble? Has anything gone wrong?"

"No, no, nothing wrong. Nothing like that," I lied quickly. I couldn't bring myself to tell her the truth.

"Is Mr. Buttle still there, Pete?" Mrs. Donovan asked.

I could answer that one truthfully. "Oh, yes. Yes, indeed, Mrs. Donovan. Mr. Buttle is still here." I hated to think of how long he was going to stay here. I hated to think about Mr. Buttle's probable attitude by now at all.

"Are you making everything nice for him, Pete?" Mrs. Donovan asked. "Is he seeing everything?"

"He's seeing plenty, Mrs. Donovan," I said hollowly.

"That's fine. I'm so glad. I was worried. This means so much, doesn't it, Pete? I, I guess I've worked myself into a state where a disappointment would be awful. I'm silly that way. I know I shouldn't. But, well, I hope you understand, Pete."

"I understand perfectly, Mrs. Donovan," I declared. And then, before I could stop myself, I added: "Just leave everything to me."

Mrs. Donovan's tired little old voice came back relievedly. "Of course, Pete. I don't know what I'd ever do without you. Goodbye, and call me as soon as anything happens."

I put the telephone back in the cradle, feeling all the while like a guy who has just kicked a sweet little old lady into the path of the *Broadway Limited*.

I put my head in my hands. This was too much. Nothing worse could happen. Nothing more awful could—

The telephone rang again that instant. I picked it up.

"Hello!" yelled a frantic voice. "I want room service. I want the management. I want help!"

I breathed a terrible curse as I recognized that voice. It was Buttle.

"What," I gulped hysterically, "is wrong?"

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"My room," squealed Mr. Buttle, "is filled, no—crammed, with rabbits and pigeons!"

"Rabbits and pigeons?" I echoed aghast.

"Hundreds of them!" Mr. Buttle yelped. And then I heard him yipe shrilly and slam the phone down into place.

IT WAS a little less than two minutes later when I was dashing along the tenth floor corridor toward Mr. Buttle's room near the end of the hallway.

I could see that his door was ajar, and I could also see that the door of the suite just beyond his room was also open. The suite in which I'd placed Colonel Applegate and his pint sized magician.

I don't know why I didn't see the pigeons on leaping from the elevator to the hallway—or the rabbits either, for that matter. But they were there, all right. The rabbits bounding in droves from the Applegate-Hindu suite, and the pigeons flapping noisily around in the hallway.

There must have been close to a hundred of them. And all were emerging from the tenth floor suite of Colonel Applegate and his damned magician!

I came to a skidding stop in front of Mr. Buttle's door. He was inside there, wearing nothing but an old fashioned nightshirt. And he was standing atop his dresser, purple faced with horror, while about his room swarmed a veritable rabbit and pigeon zoo.

He saw me, and his mouth opened and closed wordlessly.

I waved my hand, signaling him to hold on. Then I rushed on to the open door of the colonel's suite from which all this wild life was swarming.

The colonel sat comfortably in an easy chair in the drawing room of the suite, looking in benign approval at his half pint magician, Hoako the Hindu, who was standing in the center of the madhouse, holding a silk hat in his right hand, while extracting pigeons and rabbits at random from the depths of the topper.

"What in the hell is all this?" I screeched from the doorway.

Colonel Applegate looked up.

He smiled. "Oh, ahhh, yes, come in. Do come in. You can be of invaluable assistance. We are rehearsing."

"Rehearsing?" I screamed the word.

"The rabbit-silk hat routine," the colonel explained. "Can't seem to get it down right."

"You'll get it down right!" I yelled. "You'll get it down in some other hotel. Get the hell out of here. Get those damned pigeons and rabbits out with you. Get your magician out of here, too!"

The colonel's smile disappeared. He gave me a frostily disapproving stare.

"Rabbits and doves," he said. "Not pigeons."

"Doves or pigeons, I don't care which. Get them the hell out of here, and take yourselves with them!" I screamed.

Hoako the Hindu looked up from his rehearsing. For an instant he pulled no more rabbits and pigeons from his silk topper.

Then he saw that the door in which I was standing was open.

He grinned apologetically, glanced at his mentor.

"Colonel," Hoako declared. "Maybe this guy has got a legit beef. We left the door open. I'll bet the doves and rabbits is all over the place."

The colonel raised his eyebrows. He looked at me, and then the open door. His frosty attitude thawed into one of apologetic friendliness.

"Haw," he said. "So we did. So we did. Awfully sorry, old man. Didn't

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realize it. Hope we haven't caused any trouble."

Hoako, scratching his head, sheepishly put the silk hat down on the bed.

"Get rid of the rabbits, Hoako," the colonel ordered.

Hoako waved his hands in a wide gesture.

"Abracadabra," he declared.

"And the doves," the colonel added.

"Ala salaba," Hoako said, repeating the gesture.

My eyes almost fell out of my head. I reeled back against the door jam. There were no more rabbits. No more pigeons. *Hoako had made them vanish as easily as he had been making them appear!*

"There," the colonel said affably. "Does that satisfy you?"

I gurgled something and staggered out of the room down to Buttle's adjoining room. I peered in the doorway there.

There were no more rabbits or pigeons in Buttle's room!

NIGHT-SHIRTED Mr. Buttle, his eyes filled with terror and tears, his face a portrait of bewilderment, was climbing shakily down from his perch on his dresser. His mouth was still working as he tried to say things to me, but no sounds came.

I stepped across to his dresser and helped him down.

"I want to get out," Mr. Buttle finally croaked feebly. "I want to get out of here before I lose my mind completely!"

I was thinking swiftly, desperately. No matter what happened, I couldn't let him out of my clutches now. Maybe there'd be some way to soothe this over. Maybe if I could throw the damned magician and his manager out of the hotel, and convince Mr. Buttle that he'd been the victim of self-delusions, we could still peddle the hotel to him.

Maybe.

"Look," I said sympathetically. "I don't know what's wrong with you. But obviously you aren't feeling well. Maybe you're having halucinations or something."

Mr. Buttle looked wild eyed at me.

"Didn't you see them?" He whispered hoarsely, his fingers biting deep in my arm.

"See what?" I lied.

"The rabbits," Mr. Buttle said. "And the damned pigeons!" He shuddered deeply and swayed back and forth on his rubbery little legs.

I forced a humoring smile. "Now maybe you'd better get some rest," I said soothingly. "I'm sure it will fix you up fine. A nap is all you need."

"I want to get out of here," Mr. Buttle said brokenly. He started swayingly toward his open suitcase near his bed.

I picked up the room telephone.

"Send up some sleeping pills!" I barked into it. "Snappy!"

I took Mr. Buttle gently by the shoulders, forcing him down onto his bed.

"Just lie there a minute and rest," I told him. "Everything is going to be all right. You wait and see."

I hoped to hell, in my secret mind, that it would be all right.

While Mr. Buttle went through a series of shuddering spells, I paced the room and went quietly crazy trying to find a solution to his mess. Then the bellhop arrived with the sleeping pills. I gave a couple of them, plus a glass of water, to Mr. Buttle.

"Here," I said. "Take these. They'll make everything fine!"

Mr. Buttle swallowed them unprotestingly with the water. I fixed his pillow, covered him up, and stood back watching the drowsiness take effect. A

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few minutes later and he was sleeping.

Mopping a fevered brow, I closed his door behind me and stepped down the hall to Colonel Applegate's suite. I pounded on their door for almost two minutes before I realized that they weren't going to answer. I went down to the elevators at the end of the hall.

"Has Colonel Applegate left in the last ten minutes?" I asked the elevator boy when he stopped at the tenth.

"Yes, sir. Just about five minutes ago. The little man with the turban wasn't with him, though."

I went back to the door of the Applegate suite. I found a passkey and stepped inside a moment later.

The place was deserted.

"Hoako!" I hollered. "Come out, wherever you are."

No answer. I stormed through the bedrooms and the rest of the suite. No sign of the little magician. And yet the elevator boy hadn't seen him leave.

THEN I saw the note on the desk in the drawing room. It was written in a scrawly, childish hand. Obviously by Joe Jobe, alias Hoako.

"Dear Colonel:

I have gone out of the world for about twenty minutes. I will practice some more when I get back.

Joe, Hoako the Hindu, Jobe."

This, definitely, was more than I could stand!

I must have been frothing mad as I churned out of their suite and stormed my way to the desk down in the lobby.

For fully five minutes I was so purple I couldn't utter an intelligible word. And when I was finally coherent again, I screamed instructions at the bellhops, doorman, chambermaids and guests as to what to do the moment any of them caught either Colonel Applegate or his half-baked Hindu sticking their noses into the hotel again.

And then for another ten minutes I panthered back and forth in a secluded corner of the lobby, trying to twist and turn the problem of Mr. Buttle-the-would-be-buyer of the Hotel Harmony into some chance of solution.

For I was aware that it was one thing to knock Mr. Buttle out with sleeping pills and keep him a virtual prisoner in the Hotel Harmony, and quite another to return him to his happy potential-buyer frame of mind when he woke up.

He'd been thinking of packing his bag and fleeing this madhouse, undoubtedly, when he opened his eyes again. And yet, if there was something I could do along the line I'd hastily conceived some fifteen minutes ago—something that would make him think he was sick and nothing more than the victim of his own imagination—I might have a chance of pushing the hotel off on him before he was quite aware of what had happened.

The situation, bad as it was, could have been worse. He could, for example, have jumped from the window of his tenth floor room when the rabbits and pigeons swarmed into the place.

I shuddered at the thought of the grease blob our buyer would have made on the sidewalk under those circumstances. Shuddered and thanked God that he was still alive and intact.

And I was congratulating myself on this fact, while mentally deciding that the situation was still not lost as long as nothing further in the way of complications occurred, when the commotion started on the mezzanine balcony overlooking the lobby.

My first indication of the furor came in the form of several shrill feminine yelps from the lobby itself. I looked up to see three women standing underneath the mezzanine balcony railing,

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gazing up in terror at the scene above them.

With a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach, I let my eyes follow their horrified gazes.

And then I, too, felt like yelping shrilly. For Mr. Buttle was up there on the mezzanine balcony. Mr. Buttle and Hoako the Hindu. And quite obviously Mr. Buttle wasn't at all aware that he was up there. For he was still in his nightshirt, and sound asleep. Sound asleep, *and floating horizontally some three feet from the floor, while Hoako the Hindu, palms extended flat over Mr. Buttle's sleeping form, maneuvered him this way and that!*

Hoako the Hindu was practicing again.

And then I saw Hoako, still steering the horizontally floating form of Mr. Buttle before him, start down the mezzanine stairs to the lobby itself.

OTHERS in the lobby, attracted by the yipping of the three dames, were gathering in a rapidly growing group of spectators by the time I was out and around the desk and racing headlong toward the staircase down which Hoako was piloting Mr. Buttle.

But by the time I reached Hoako and Mr. Buttle, the half pint magician was already down the stairs and starting to steer his floating victim across the lobby.

And the crowd was surging in around us, forming an ooohing and ahhing, and laughing gallery.

For as near as I was to the brink of insanity at that moment, even I was aware that the night-shirted, plump, floating little body of Mr. Buttle *did* look ridiculous.

"Hoako!" I hissed desperately. "Hoako, for God's sake, take him back upstairs where you got him!"

But Hoako the Hindu, alias Joe Jobe, didn't seem to hear me. His gaze was cloudily fixed on Mr. Buttle's horizontally drifting carcass. He seemed deep in a trance.

"Take him back upstairs, Hoako!" I said more sharply.

Hoako the Hindu still didn't look up. He continued to move along behind Mr. Buttle's floating form as he steered it along.

"Damn you," I yelled, "take him back upstairs!"

Hoako the Hindu's eyes grew a trifle less cloudy. A little light appeared in them. But still no glimmer of response.

The crowd was hooting hysterically by now.

"Pass a hoop around his body," someone shouted. "See if it isn't all done by wires."

"Or mirrors," another wag yelled.

I grabbed Hoako the Hindu viciously by the arm, jerking him around to face me.

"Listen, you—" I started to shout hotly. "This is too mu—."

And in the next sickening instant I realized I had done the wrong thing.

For, with Hoako's concentration disrupted, Mr. Buttle crashed heavily to the floor of the lobby, landing with a smack on his back and nether extremity!

"Oh, God!" I gurgled, releasing my grip on Hoako.

Mr. Buttle was blinking wildly, rubbing his eyes with his pudgy fists, and gazing around like a stricken woodland gazelle.

Hoako's voice, indignantly reproachful, exclaimed: "Now look what you went and made me do!"

The spectators were roaring with laughter now, and Buttle, scrambling to his feet with frantic embarrassment, uttered a choked, confused cry and tried to sweep his nightshirt tighter

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around his pudgy frame.

Suddenly I wanted very much to fade from view. But before I could do so, Mr. Buttle's bewilderedly accusing gaze lanced me.

"So," he said hoarsely. "So!"

"Look," I cried frantically. "It's all a mis—"

But Mr. Buttle wasn't waiting around to hear what I had to say. He dashed toward the elevators and into the cage of one just about to go up, while the derisive hoots and guffaws of the lobby crowd followed him.

I started after him, then stopped. I'd seen the look in his eye. The look he gave me. If I'd had the proverbial chance of a snowball in hell to sell him the hotel fifteen minutes before it, was a cinch that said chance had now vanished.

THERE would be no talking Buttle out of leaving *this* time. I had awful, sinking visions of myself staying at the Hotel Harmony until both the building and I were condemned as unfit for further service.

But that didn't lessen the emotional reaction I had toward Hoako the Hindu. And it didn't cut down the verbal barrage I sent his way in the next instant.

"And furthermore, you —*†—!"&(‡"*§!!!," I concluded a full five minutes later, "I'll see to it, personally, that you and your damned manager spend the rest of your lives in jail!"

Hoako the Hindu had been listening wide-eyed through my tirade, but in the last few lines of it, his gaze had wandered up and over my shoulder. It was still fixed there as I concluded breathlessly.

"What's this? What's this?" a deep rumbling voice demanded behind me.

I wheeled to face Colonel Applegate, who had just returned to the hotel.

"I'll tell you what this is!" I yelled.

Colonel Applegate raised his hand, as his button eyes swept around the fascinated group of spectators surrounding us.

"Come, come, sir. I would prefer that you state your, ahhh, complaints in a place somewhat more private."

I nodded grimly. "Okay. You bet I will. Come right along!" I led the colonel and his half pint magician into my private office to the rear of the desk.

Slamming the door, I turned on the colonel.

"Your magician," I thundered, "has gone too far. For the fourth time he has jeopardized the sanity of the tenant adjoining your suite on the tenth floor." I paused for breath. "And now said guest will undoubtedly pack up and leave."

The colonel had been listening with his tufted brows knotted in concentration. Now they suddenly smoothed, and he raised his hand characteristically to interrupt.

"Ahhhhhh," he declared. "I see what you mean. Of course. Of course. The guest my, ahhh, magician has annoyed is leaving your hostelry, eh?"

"Precisely," I grated. "And what's more, I—"

The colonel cut me off again.

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow. It's a simple matter to adjust. I shall merely reimburse you for the rent you will lose by his leaving."

He started to dig in his pocket for his wallet.

"Listen," I began again.

"Isn't that a satisfactory, ahhh, adjustment?" the colonel demanded.

"No!" I yelled emphatically. "No. It is not!"

And then I was off and running. Running at the mouth. In no small detail did I omit the complete picture of the mess they'd put me in. I

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screamed forth the facts about poor old Mrs. Donovan. I set down with cold, biting bitterness, the events they had contributed to in driving our potential buyer to near madness. And when I finished, out of breath and somewhat glassy-eyed, five minutes later, I glared from Hoako to the colonel and back.

"So, you see," I snarled, "a mere matter of rent missing is not the trouble. It is plenty deeper than that."

The colonel looked sober. Hoako looked guiltily ashamed, like a small boy who has been caught pitching pennies in church.

COLONEL APPLEGATE tugged reflectively at the end of his sweeping gray moustache. He squinted in concentration, his button eyes disappearing beneath the rolls under them.

"You say the owner of this hotel is, ahhhh, a poor widow?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Hmmmmmmm," said Colonel Applegate. "I wonder if we could. I wonder. Hmmmmmm. It isn't ethical. But, ahhhh, the situation might seem to warrant it."

"What the hell are you muttering in your moustache about?" I demanded.

Colonel Applegate gave me an offended glance. "I was just arriving at a solution to your dilemma," he said.

"Solution?" I yelped. "You mean you can—" And then I stopped. "No, you don't," I said quickly. "You've messed things up badly enough already. Keep out of this!"

"Could it be any worse than it is now?" Hoako the Hindu asked quietly.

The colonel nodded. "Precisely. What could we do now that could hurt the situation, ahhh, further? It is obvious that your prospective buyer is no longer such."

"You could have us all tossed in jail," I suggested. "No. I don't think I'd be smart to trust you two—"

The colonel raised his hand and cut me off. "Tut, tut. I give you the Applegate word of honor that we will do nothing to bring any of us into a court of law!"

I looked at him indecisively.

"What do you say?" the colonel asked. "Will you permit us to repair the damage done?"

"Oh, God," I groaned. "If you only could!" Then another thought occurred to me. "What's your plan?"

The colonel looked solemn. "Hypnotize the chap," he said.

"Hypnotize him?" I squealed. "Why, that would be like putting a man under morphine and making him buy something. It, it would mean the pen for us all!"

The colonel shook his aristocratic head. "Not at all," he explained. "Not at all. You see, we would hypnotize the blighter, bring him out of it, and *then* have him buy the hotel."

"I don't get it," I said flatly.

"The power of suggestion," said the colonel, "is extraordinarily strong under hypnosis. We can have Hoako hypnotize the chap, and while he is in that state, convince him that none of the things which occurred to him in his stay here at your hotel *actually* occurred. We can, through suggestion, make his memory insofar as what happened here a complete blank."

"So when he comes out of the hypnosis he'll have no recollection of the invisible waiter, the rope trick, the rabbits and pigeons, or floating horizontally downstairs in his nightshirt?" I demanded.

"Precisely," said Colonel Applegate.

"Yeah," Hoako the Hindu seconded.

"Are you *sure* you can do this?" I asked.

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"In the realm of the occult, nothing is certain. It has, however, been accomplished in other cases I have read of," Colonel Applegate said.

I squared my shoulders, took a deep breath. "Let's find Buttle," I said. . . .

MR. BUTTLE had his bags packed and was frantically getting into his camel's hair overcoat when the colonel, Hoako, and I entered his room. The moment he saw us, his face went ashen and he backed slightly away.

"What do you want?" Mr. Buttle demanded hysterically. "What devilment are you three up to now?"

"Listen," I said soothingly, "we aren't going to hurt you. We just want a few moments of your time."

Mr. Buttle sidled nervously toward his bags. "I haven't any time," he croaked. "I'm leaving here, now, right away, at once."

Colonel Applegate gave me a sidelong glance. He sighed, our signal to advance on him together, should force become necessary to hold him for the experiment.

The colonel was surprisingly strong, amazingly agile. We had Mr. Buttle helplessly on the bed in less than a minute. Hoako advanced and stood over him, while the colonel and I held.

There was a burning intensity in Hoako's eyes as he glared forcefully down at the prostrate and pinioned Mr. Buttle.

Buttle groaned, and turned his head away from the glance.

"Hold his head," Hoaka ordered.

The colonel put his large hand on Buttle's forehead, pressing palm down so the chubby little victim couldn't turn away.

"Look at me!" Hoako said.

Mr. Buttle closed his eyes and shuddered.

"Pry his eyelids open, and hold 'em open," said Hoako.

I moved around so that I could hold both Buttle's arms. Then the colonel, his other hand free, opened Buttle's eyes forcibly with thumb and forefinger.

"Unreceptive duck," commented the colonel. "This will take a bit of doing."

Hoako was wordless now. But he continued to stare commandingly down at the helpless Mr. Buttle. His brows, beneath his silly white turban, were knotted in concentration from the effort. Sweat was starting to bead his forehead.

"You are getting sleepy," said Hoako somnambulantly.

"No, I'm not," Mr. Buttle yiped shrilly. "I never felt more wide awake."

"You are getting sleepy," Hoako repeated insistently. "Sleepy, sleepy, sleepy!"

"No," Buttle choked. "No." His reply seemed weaker.

"Sleepy," Hoako repeated, his voice suddenly growing soothing. "Very, very sleepy. Rest, rest. Think only of rest." The drops of sweat beading his brow were now starting to trickle down his nose.

And then, much to my amazement, Buttle answered docilely: "Yes. Yes, I am very tired. I want to rest. I want to sleep."

"Sure you do," said Hoako. "You want to sleep. You want to sleeeeep, sleep, sleeeeep."

Mr. Buttle sighed. "Yes." he said.

Colonel Applegate released his pressure on Buttle's eyelids. They remained open, staring, glazed.

Hoako bent over Buttle and passed his hand before his eyes several times. There was no reaction.

"You are asleep," Hoako declared.

"Yes— I am asleep," Buttle replied in a far-away voice.

"Release his arms," the colonel said.

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I stopped holding Buttle, and the colonel took his palm from the chubby little guy's forehead. I noticed, then, that the colonel's brow was also beaded with sweat.

"You want to forget some things," Hoako said soothingly.

"I want to forget some things," Buttle repeated.

Hoako nodded at the colonel. "He's right where we want him," he whispered. Then he turned his attention back to Buttle.

"You want to forget about the invisible waiter you saw in the restaurant," Hoako declared.

"I forget having seen an invisible waiter," Buttle responded.

"You forget that rope trick," said Hoako.

"I saw no rope trick," Buttle answered mechanically.

"You didn't see any doves and rabbits," Hoako went on.

"There were no doves and rabbits," Buttle said.

"You didn't float downstairs and wake up embarrassed in the lobby with nothing on but a nightshirt," Hoako told him.

"No floating. No lobby. No embarrassment. Never happened," Mr. Buttle's voice declared.

The colonel looked triumphantly at me. "Good enough?" he asked.

"Will it stick?" I asked.

The colonel nodded. "It should."

"Usually does," Hoako seconded.

I HAD a sudden brainstorm. "Why not put in a few plugs for the Hotel Harmony now that we got him this way?"

The colonel looked dubious. "We've already used Hoako's powers somewhat unethically. Don't know as if it would be right."

"Think of the poor old lady you two almost gypped. Poor Mrs. Donovan. If you put in a plug, it'll sort of even things up."

The colonel thought this over a second, then nodded. "Very well," he said, giving the Hoako the go signal.

"Marvelous hotel, the Harmony," Hoaka said, putting his attention back in focus on Buttle. "Cheap at any price. You'll be a lucky man if they let you buy it."

"It is wonderful," said Mr. Buttle from his trance. "It is a positive steal. I'll be lucky to buy it."

"You'd be a fool if you passed up a chance to buy it," Hoako declared.

"I would be a fool," Buttle echoed.

"Swell," I said. "Now bring him out of it."

Hoako's gesture was swift, the noise startling, as he clapped his hands under Buttle's nose. Buttle blinked, shook his head, staring uncertainly at the colonel, Hoako, and me.

"Wh-where am I?" he asked without much originality.

I stepped in, then. Stepped in and told him. And did a neat bit of lying to account for the time that had passed which he wouldn't recall. Briefly, I explained that he had come in here an hour or so ago, signed the register as John Smith, and collapsed. I told him that we'd called a medico, who ordered him to bed here in his room for a few hours rest.

"I must have had some shock," Buttle said weakly, sitting up. "My recollection of everything is fuzzy, blurred. Did the doctor think there was anything seriously wrong with me?"

"No," I said laughingly lying in my teeth. "No. You're in perfect shape. He said he wouldn't have to look at you again. He said when you woke up you'd be okay."

"I do remember something about this hotel," Buttle frowned. "It's very

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strong in my mind. This is the Hotel Harmony, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," I said quickly.

Buttle thought a minute. "I want to buy it," he said suddenly. "That's what was sticking in the back of my mind. I remember that it's a wonderful buy. Very urgent that I snap it up."

I was beaming as I fished into my pocket and drew out the sales contract I'd had ready and prepared ever since he arrived. I handed him the contract and the fountain pen Colonel Applegate produced.

"Here you are. Better grab it now."

Buttle looked it over. "Cheap at the price," he said.

"Sign right there, Mr. Buttle," I told him. "Then I'll sign, and the colonel and his friend," I indicated Hoako, "can sign as witnesses to the deal."

I felt like yowling and screaming for joy. Inside everything was a warm, flushed elation. This was triumph. Triumph after almost certain defeat.

But Mr. Buttle was holding the pen and the contract and looking at me queerly.

"What did you call me?" he asked.

"Why, Mr. Buttle," I said. "I knew you were Buttle the moment I saw you, even though you registered here as John Smith—incognito."

"But I *am not* Mr. Buttle," he said. "My name *is* John Smith. What's all this about?"

Everything inside me started turning around like a top.

"What?" I squealed.

AND at that instant someone was knocking on the door, and Hoako was across the room to open it. A bellhop stood there. Next to him was a tall, thin, dyspeptic chap with gray hair and a miserly set to his mouth. "This gentleman insisted on being taken to you immediately, sir," the bellhop declared, addressing me. "He said his name is Mr. Buttle."

"You're damned right my name is Mr. Buttle," said the tall, gray haired drink of acid, striding into the room.

His eyes flashed from me to the colonel and then to Hoako, finally resting on the guy I'd mistaken for Buttle. They seemed to read the contract my chubby mistake held in his hand at a glance.

"What's this?" the tall, thin, *real* Buttle demanded. "Is that fourflusher trying to buy this hotel out from under my nose?"

The chubby, ex-Mr. Buttle, John Smith by fact, rose indignantly to his feet.

"Whoever you are, sir, I won't be so insulted. You're damned right I'm buying this hotel," he declared, clutching the contract in his fat little paw.

"At what price?" thundered the acidulous old gent who was really Buttle.

The John Smith who'd been mistaken for Buttle looked down at the contract in his hand. He looked up.

"Listed price," he said. "Fifty thousand."

"I'll pay seventy-five," said our newcomer angrily.

"I'll pay a hundred thousand," said the ex-Mr. Buttle.

"A hundred and five thousand," said the thin, gray, *real* Buttle.

My head was swimming. A hundred and five grand—twice what I thought I'd get!

"A hundred and ten thousand," said the chubby little John Smith, after a moment's hesitation. He seemed to be dreading another bid upping. It showed on his face, and the real Buttle saw it.

"A hundred and twenty," said old acid pan.

There was a silence. The fat, round,

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little John Smith choked. Tears came to his eyes.

"I don't have any more money than my last bid," he said.

The thin, honest-injun Buttle grinned triumphantly. He snatched the contract from the guy I'd originally thought to be Buttle. He pulled a fountain pen from his pocket, scratched his name across the bottom, and handed it to me. I signed promptly, then the colonel and Hoako completed the deal with their witnessing signatures. I pocketed my copy.

John Smith watched it all disconsolately.

The thin, acidulous Mr. Buttle pulled out three checks. He handed them to me. "You beat my price up," he admitted. "These checks are certified, and amount to a hundred and twenty thousand. I was," and here he grinned gloatingly, "prepared to pay more. But now the bargain is sealed, no backing out. You see, this hotel property will be bought by the government at a handsome price very shortly. They'll put up Factory Number Ten, for gunsights, here."

Colonel Applegate started chuckling. I looked at the real Buttle and then to Applegate, while my stomach turned inside.

"The joke is on you, my dear man," Applegate told the real Buttle. "Factory Ten, for gunsights, has already selected a site. I ought to know. They recently contracted for my Novelty Products Factory. Put me out of business, but with a handsome profit, of course."

It was the real Buttle's turn to look sick.

"That's a lie!" he gurgled.

Colonel Applegate shrugged. "As you like, sir. I know it to be true. I'm but a disinterested spectator."

"And as you said, Mr. Buttle," I threw the last knife into our thin drink-of-acid's neck, "the deal is sealed. You can't back out!"

I started for the door then, my knees hardly strong enough to hold me up. But in my pocket was the signed contract, plus the certified checks. I wanted to get to a telephone. This time it would be a pleasure to talk to old Mrs. Donovan . . .

IT WAS when I was walking out of the lobby of the Hotel Harmony the following day, bags in hand and headed for the swank hotel I now manage, that Colonel Applegate, carrying a telegram in his hand, staggered weakly over to me and grabbed my arm.

"Look," he said chokingly. "Look at that. I'll sue the bounder. I have a contract. I've made bookings. I'll sue him!"

I took the telegram from his trembling hand.

"AM ON WAY TO WASHINGTON, AFTER BEING ACCEPTED THIS MORNING FOR SECRET SERVICE DUTY. FEEL IT ONLY RIGHT I SERVE U. S. MIGHT BE OF HELP. HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND.
JOE, HOAKO THE HINDU, JOBE."

"The Secret Service!" Colonel Applegate groaned. "Hoako has joined the Secret Service!"

I grinned, thinking of the little guy who could make things vanish and people disappear. Maybe he could try his hand on Hitler.

"It's just like you said yesterday morning, Colonel," I answered. "Those damned priorities!"

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Men SCARED

by

E. K. JARVIS

Deep in the jungle was a weird "nothing" that made the souls of men shudder. It was Klipura, the mighty!

WAVELL DARK brought the heavy rifle to his shoulder. His gray eyes sought the line of the sights. At the foot of the slope below the log house, at the edge of the river, a party of natives were busy preparing the torches to light the canoes on their return journey. Across the sullen flood of the river, distant a good three hundred yards, three fat logs lay stranded on a sandbar. Dark lined up the sights. Frowning, he took the gun

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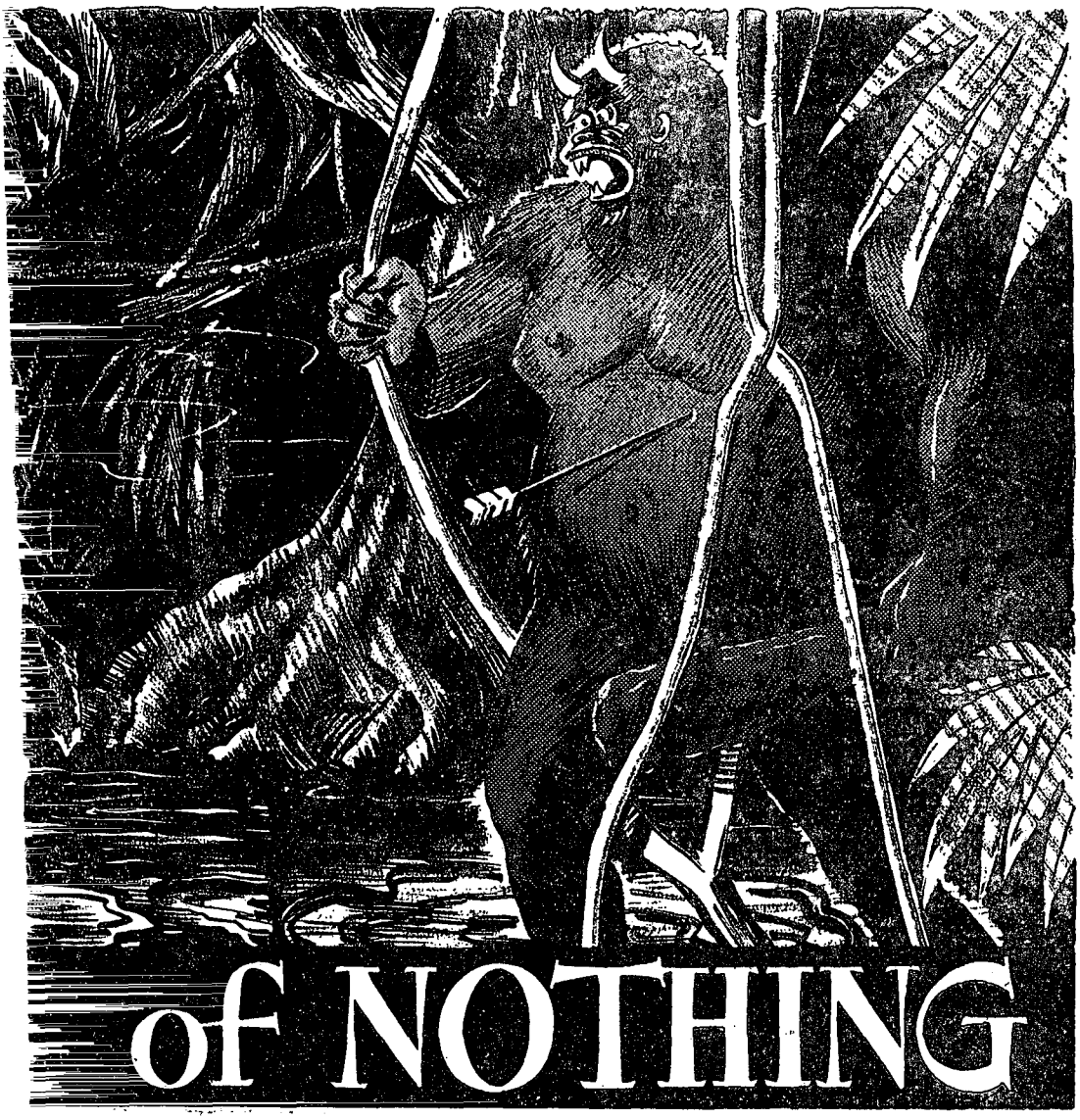

With a coughing grunt Klipura lurched into view

from his shoulder and glanced up at the lowering sun.

"Light's bad," Mosier muttered, interpreting his glance. Mosier was sitting on the steps. He was a biologist, and a good one. Weighing perhaps two hundred and fifty pounds, he normally possessed all the good humor characteristic of fat men. He wasn't in a good humor now. He slapped fretfully at the mosquitoes, and the tiny camera, suspended on a leather cord around his neck, bounced up and down with the motion.

"Too near night," he said. "Light's bad. And you're shooting down."

Dark glanced down at the broad back. He was rather fond of this fat biologist and he was inclined to sympathize with Mosier's exasperation. "I'll take the middle one," he said.

He brought the gun up again. Muscles writhed steadily in his thick forearms. His brown cheek cuddled gently

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against the stock. The barrel came up slowly, smoothly, steadied for an instant. Mosier put his fingers in his ears. The gun roared.

Across the river two of the logs stranded on the sandbar erupted to violent life. Raising on short forelegs, they hurtled into the water. The middle log lifted too, to whirl in a dozen fantastic somersaults. Then, forelegs pawing at the sand, it dragged itself into the river. A second later it flashed to the surface, splashing as it rolled. It ceased rolling. The current caught it. Yellowish belly up, it floated with the flood.

"It was a good shot," Mosier admitted. "Not quite dead center or even a crocodile would not have been able to move after so heavy a bullet hit it, but a good shot. It is a good gun that you have had sent to you from the states. But why an elephant gun, Dark? Why an under-and-over rifle in this country?"

He waved his hands at the jungle stretched away in a warm haze under the lowering sun. Mosier had just arrived from up stream. He made regular trips to this country, gathering specimens for some museum in the United States. Every time he went up or down the river he stopped at Dark's rubber plantation.

Dark retired into silence. He was not a big man; he wouldn't tip the scales past 170. But he was all bone and hardened muscle. He slapped at the mosquitoes, lit a cigarette, and spoke out of a cloud of smoke.

"I got troubles."

Mosier waited for him to go on. When he didn't, the biologist waved his hands apologetically. "Look, Dark, I'm not trying to pry. Your business is your business. But I am not exactly unfamiliar with this jungle, and if you are in trouble, I might be able to help. But I can't for the life of me understand how an elephant gun can help you solve your troubles."

"Animals," said Dark. "An animal."

"Nonsense!" Mosier exploded. "Animals! That is nonsense. This is the Amazon country. We have here the jaguar, we have the tapir—" He ticked them off one by one on his fingers. "We have monkeys, big and little. But there is in all of South America no animal that is hunted with an elephant gun. No rhinos, no hippos, no big water buffalos, and no elephants. They just aren't here, my friend."

"Yeah," Dark answered. "I know. Hello, Merto. What say?"

AS SILENTLY as a jaguar, Merto had come around the corner of the house. He was a native, but he stood a good six feet two inches in his bare feet and he was all man.

"Master, the drums," he said.

Dark listened. In the far distance, almost lost in the tropic stillness, was a thin rattle of sound, the talking drums.

"What do they say?" Dark questioned. He had spent years in this jungle but neither he nor any white man had ever learned the meaning of the drums.

"They talk of *Klipura,*" Merto answered. He showed no fear. If anything, he stood a little straighter.

A shadow crossed Dark's face. It was instantly gone. "How do they talk —of *Klipura?*"

"They say *Klipura* walks."

"Is that all they say?"

"They say they are afraid. The hands of the drummers shake with fear."

The shadow came back to Dark's face. He was sitting in a crude chair on the front veranda, his feet on the railing. His fingers tightened on the

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elephant gun that lay across his legs. Merto watched him. When he showed no disposition to ask further questions, the native turned and vanished around the house as silently as he had come.

Mosier smote fist into palm. "By damn, Dark, that man of yours is the finest specimen of physical manhood I ever saw. There's nothing like him in these jungles. I'd give my right eye to know his genealogy."

"He's pure native," Dark answered, the shadow still on his face. "He comes from the tribe that gathers my rubber. You've seen them."

Mosier nodded emphatically. "He comes from a race that averages four and a half feet tall and weighs, when times are good and they have enough to eat, a husky hundred pounds. They're damned near pygmies, your rubber gatherers are. But Merto is a giant. How does it happen that a race of pygmies can produce a giant?"

"You'll have to answer your own question. You're the biologist."

Mosier nodded again. "I can answer it. He's a freak, a sport, a mutation. Nature seems never to cease experimenting. She's always trying to improve the stock. We know how she goes about doing it too. She uses cosmic rays, radiations from radium, and possibly a dozen other forces about which we know nothing as yet, to produce changes in the germ plasm which in turn produces mutations, freaks. Usually these freaks are monsters, but occasionally—and Merto is one of those occasions—they are perfect physical specimens. That's how evolution is brought about, on a grand scale, in nature's laboratory. The same thing happens to plants. This new rubber tree of yours, that you're tending so carefully, is also a mutation."

The biologist was full of the subject. It was his life's work and at the slightest opportunity, he would talk his head off about it. He went on talking. Dark wasn't listening. In the far distance he could hear the whispering drums. Inside the house he could hear a man packing his belongings, a man named Clayton, who had been Dark's sole assistant. Had been. Down at the river landing the natives finished preparing their torches and began looking expectantly up toward the house.

A shrilling *tucano,* frightened by something lurking in the jungle, flew across the path that led from the house down to the edge of the river. Dark's eyes followed the flight of the bird. His mind was elsewhere.

THE door banged. Clayton came out, a bag in each hand. He was thin and sallow, with a ragged mustache and sandy hair. He had been here in the jungle, as Dark's assistant, for three years. He set the bags down and went over to shake hands with Dark. Mosier watched him.

"Sorry, Mr. Dark," Clayton said, "Forget it. You're doing what's right. I don't blame you."

Clayton seemed relieved. "Nice of you to take it that way. I really hate to run out on you, but I've got to get away from here for six months. I'll come back after I've had a rest, but if I stay here another month—another week—I'll crack up."

His voice was a husky note in the thickening shadows of night.

"If I hadn't seen it," the voice said, the words coming in little gusty sounds. "If I hadn't seen it, I would have been able to stay. But I saw it—"

"Forget it," Dark said, slapping him on the shoulder. "Go back to civilization and take a rest. You'll be all right as soon as you get out of the jungle." Again he slapped his former helper on the shoulder. Still apologizing, Clay-

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ton picked up his bags and started down the path that led to the river. The two men watched him. He vanished into the shadows toward the waiting canoes.

"What's the matter with him?" Mosier questioned suddenly.

"He saw it," Dark answered.

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Klipura," Dark said tonelessly. *"It. Klipura.* The natives think it is a jungle demon."

"A jungle demon! What kind of a monkey business is this? Have you gone off your nut, Dark?"

"I haven't seen it. But my rubber workers believe in it."

"Hell, they believe in anything!" the biologist exploded. 'Every tribe, every village, has a jungle demon. It's twiddle-twaddle, Dark. It results from the efforts of the primitive mind to explain the forces of nature in terms the natives can understand. When a storm comes, they say a demon caused it. If a croc carries off one of their kids, they say the river demon took it. If you pay any attention to the natives, they'll have you believing there's a demon behind every tree. You don't mean to tell me that you—*Say, is that why you had that elephant gun brought in here?"*

Dark hesitated. "Well—yes."

There was a moment of silence. Then the biologist spoke soothingly. "My friend, you had better take a trip to civilization and have yourself looked over. Put yourself in the hands of some good doctor and get a thorough examination. Sometimes these tropic fevers get a man down before he knows it."

"Clayton saw it," Dark said almost defensively.

"Clayton is wise enough to know when he needs a check-up."

"He said it was about seven feet tall and covered all over with gray fur. He said it walked on two legs and carried a club. It was big, he said. Big. So I got an elephant gun," Dark ended.

"Fever," Mosier diagnosed. "There is no animal in this country answering that description. Nor in any other country. I know. That is my business."

"No animal, perhaps. Demon."

"Tosh! Fiddle-faddle! Nonsense!"

To the left in the jungle, something grunted, a low forceful sound. The darkness was thick by now. At the landing the torches of the natives flared against the night. The natives had been talking, and their voices had drifted upward as a gentle murmur of sound, sound that went into sudden silence now.

DARK came to his feet, gun in hand. He took one step, jerked open the door and leaped into the house. Mosier rose, perturbed without knowing why. "What are you running for?" he asked.

The door slammed again. "I'm not running," Dark said. "Here. Take this." He shoved a long flashlight into the biologist's hands.

"Clayton!" he called sharply. "Clayton. Look out!"

Down the path a man shrieked. Once. Then the shriek was cut off by the sound of a heavy *thump*. There was a wild, harsh gibbering, a heavy grunting, a strange slobbering. The man screamed again, a sound that ran through the depths of terror into the shrill tremulo of unutterable pain.

"Light!" Dark husked. But the biologist was already using the flash, flinging a beam of bright radiance down the path.

Something loomed in the lancing beam of light. Taller than any man,

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broader than three. Hulking, heavy. In one hand it held a club, in the other hand it held an arm.

It looked up the slope, seeking the source of the light. Tiny eyes gleamed in the illumination.

"Shoot!" Mosier whispered.

"Can't. Don't know where Clayton is. The natives down below are in the line of fire," Dark answered. He ran down the path, the heavy rifle in his hands. Mosier followed.

The thing saw them coming. As lightly as a jaguar, it leaped from the path and into the tangle of the jungle. Dark's rifle boomed. It was a snap shot, hurried, without aim. The heavy slug whanged into the trees. A body crashed through the underbrush. Saplings shook. Dark fired the other barrel. He didn't have a target. He was shooting blindly.

A tornado crashed through the underbrush. It rolled away while Dark plugged fresh cartridges into his gun. Mosier held the light, playing it over the green tangle. Dark brought up the gun, seeking a target. The crashing in the underbrush died in the distance.

Clayton lay in the trail. He didn't move. The two men knelt beside him.

"God!" Mosier whispered. "It had an arm in its hand. God. . . ."

Clayton no longer had a left arm. Apparently the first heavy thump had been the club striking him. Then he had been grabbed. He had screamed. While he screamed, his arm had been torn off at the shoulder. Blood slowly rilled out of the empty socket, rilled slower and slow, and stopped running.

At the landing the natives frantically launched their canoes and paddled madly downstream. *"Klipura!"* they were screaming. *"Klipura!"*

THE drums started at sun rise. Dark, carefully pulling a clean rag through the rifle, heard the thin rattle of sound coming through the dawn. He finished pulling the rag through the gun, squinted down both barrels, snapped shut the breech and looked inquiringly at Merto.

The native was stringing a bow, one foot pressed against the stave. Muscles writhed in his brown back and the string slipped into its notch. Merto stroked his thumb across the string. It hummed. He glanced at Dark.

"They talk of *Klipura,*" he said.

"Nothing else?"

Merto squinted, turning an ear up to the sky. "They are afraid," he said. "Their hands shake. The drums talk foolishly because the hands of the drummers shake. It is hard to understand, this shaking talk."

"Listen closely."

Merto listened, mouth open, to the thin rattle of sound running through the morning sky. "They call all together. They make talk-talk."

"They do not talk of leaving?"

"No, Master. Nothing is said of leaving. They call all together and make talk-talk."

Dark sighed with relief. The natives were only holding a pow-wow. They weren't clearing out of the country, yet. He still had a little time. To get *Klipura,* to kill the jungle demon. The natives were jumpy, scared. They liked the white man, but they feared *Klipura.* How they feared him! Nothing Dark could offer would induce them to stay much longer in this region. If they left—

He thought about that. Without the help of the natives, the jungle would swarm over his new growth of rubber trees. Eight years he had spent with these new trees, working with them, babying them along. Sweat and blood. All wasted. Eight years wasted, if the natives left. Wasted because the jun-

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gle spawned a beast that frightened away his helpers. Nor could he solve the problem by getting new helpers. The talk of the drums would be relayed for hundreds of miles. No new tribe would come here and work on a plantation inhabited by a demon.

"Damn *Klipura!*" he muttered, under his breath.

The door of the house opened. Mosier stood there. The fat biologist was clad in khaki shorts. He was wearing a sun helmet. Suspended on a leather thong around his neck was a camera. He had no gun.

"Gad, what a bow!" he said, seeing Merto's weapon.

"Yeah, it's something all right," Dark said. Abruptly he changed the subject. "We ought to be back by night. In the meantime, make yourself completely at home here."

Mosier shook his head.

"You'll find the larder well stocked," Dark said. "Sorry to go off and leave you like this but I've a little job to attend to."

"But you are not going off and leaving me like this," Mosier answered. "I'm going with you."

"No."

"But, of course, I am. Do you think I am going to miss an opportunity like this? I am interested in your demon too, for scientific reasons."

Dark grinned. He decided he really liked this biologist. "Well, if you want to come along, I'm willing. But we may run into a bit of danger."

"So what, my friend? There is danger if I stay here. I might catch a fever, or something. No. Decidedly you are not going to leave me here." He came down the steps.

"Okay," Dark said. "Where's your gun?"

Mosier stared reproachfully at him. "When you have an elephant gun and your man has a six-foot bow, why should I need a weapon? No. I will do my hunting with this." He pointed at the camera.

"I wish I had a tribe like you, to work my rubber trees," Dark said approvingly. "Come on."

Merto led the way. Starting at the spot where Clayton had died, he plunged into the jungle. There were footprints in the path, huge misshapen blotches. They led into the green tangle. Merto followed. Torn vines, crumpled plants marked the trail. A heavy weight had gone this way in a hurry. As long as *Klipura* had been in a hurry, Merto had no difficulty. But *Klipura* had recovered from his fright. Merto went slower and slower still, but always he went forward. Dark followed, a step behind, the rifle ready. The biologist brought up the rear.

They passed near a space where the jungle growth had been thinned. Slender trees, spaced regularly, grew here.

"Rubber," said Dark proudly. "The beginning of what will someday be a huge plantation."

Mosier glanced around. "Where are your workers?" he questioned.

"Holding a pow-wow," Dark answered. Listening, he was aware that the drums had gone into silence.

"*Klipura* go this way," Merto said, leading on.

THE trail led near the village where the workers lived. To Dark, the silence of the drums was ominous. "We will stop for a while at the village," he said.

The natives were there all right. They greeted the white men with sullen silence.

"Scared bunch of little men," Mosier commented.

"Tell them," Dark said to Merto. "Tell them they no longer need be

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scared. Tell them I have sent far away to the country of the white men and gotten a great gun, with which to destroy *Klipura*. Tell them we seek *Klipura* now, to destroy him."

Merto relayed the message. "We will destroy the jungle demon," he said proudly. "See the new gun of the white man. With it, he will destroy the demon."

"Guns will not destroy demons," the halting answer came. "The gods are angry and they send the demon. The gods must have a sacrifice."

Beyond that, they wouldn't talk. Merto looked at Dark. "It is bad," he whispered. "They plan something, won't say what. They scared. Master must kill *Klipura*. If *Klipura* not destroyed, they not stay here long."

"Tell them *Klipura* will be dead before night," Dark answered grimly.

He turned and walked back to the jungle. Mosier followed him in sympathetic silence. The biologist knew how much this rubber plantation meant to Dark. He knew, also, upon how slender a thread it hung.

The sun was sloping toward the west when Merto halted. They were at the edge of a little glade where the ground began to slope upward toward the hills. The trail had led here. Merto did not enter the glade. He stopped suddenly, just at the edge.

Dark, a step behind him, stopped too. "It's coming," he thought. "It's here." Merto's stiffened silence told him that the native sensed something. Perhaps he didn't see it yet. But he sensed it. Dark brought the rifle forward. He didn't raise it to his shoulder. He just brought it forward, got it ready.

Behind him he could hear Moiser trying to breathe quietly. The biologist knew the jungle. He knew when to be quiet.

There wasn't a sound. It was afternoon and the air was quiet. The animals were taking a siesta. Not even a monkey was chattering. No bird called. There was only sticky heat and silent oppressive air. The jungle seemed to stand on tiptoes, listening.

Dark's eyes ranged through the green foliage. The little glade ahead of them was empty. He saw nothing. Merto moved.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Merto moved his hand, sliding a long, iron-tipped arrow across the bow. He didn't draw the bow. He stood with the arrow on the string, waiting.

"He thinks he sees something," Dark thought. "He isn't sure, but he thinks he sees something."

He whispered. "What is it?"

Merto slowly pointed.

Straining his eyes, Dark could see something in the shade of the trees across the glade. There was a tangle of green leaves, but between the leaves was a grayish blotch. Grayish! It might be the bark of a tree. It might be—*Klipura!*

Dark couldn't be certain. Piggy eyes might be watching them. *Klipura* might be waiting for them. Demon or animal, he was cunning. He had been lurking beside the trail when Clayton had come along. He might be lurking across the glade, waiting.

"Put an arrow into the gray place," Dark said softly. "If it's the trunk of a tree, nothing will be wasted. If it's *Klipura,* an arrow will bring him out."

Merto's dark face gleamed. Slowly, ever so slowly, he brought back the nock of the arrow toward his ear. He didn't release it. He didn't have time.

With a coughing grunt something erupted from the other side of the glade. It was—*Klipura!*

DARK was vaguely aware that Merto had released the arrow. He

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caught a glimpse of the iron-tipped shaft hurtling across the glade. The shaft missed. Merto had been startled and the shaft had missed. More certainly he realized that a grayish mass—it looked to him to be as big as an elephant—was charging across the clearing.

He shuffled his feet, finding a firm foothold in the leaves.

"One side, Merto," he hissed.

It was an order that Merto did not need. He knew he was in the line of fire. Besides, he saw the thing that was coming. He stepped to one side. He wanted to run. He was a native, a magnificent one but a native, with all the fears and superstitions of the primitive. He wanted to run. But his master wasn't running. And he did not run. He stepped to one side, his hand seeking another arrow.

Dark brought up the gun. It was not thirty yards across that glade. The grayish mass would cover that distance in seconds, in less than seconds. Dark snuggled the butt of the heavy rifle against his shoulder, laid his cheek against the stock. He might have been at target practice.

"Shoot!" Mosier shouted behind him, then lapsed into apologetic silence.

"One shot!" Dark thought. "One's all you get."

Somewhere in his mind was the idea that this shot had better be good.

His rubber plantation was hanging on this one shot. Eight years of his life was hanging on it, eight years in this tropic hell. That his life itself was hanging on the shot did not occur to him.

Klipura was big. He was coming like a race horse. Vaguely Dark wondered what that beast really was. It looked like King Kong. His eyes went down the sight. It seemed that *Klipura* was reaching out to take hold of the end of the gun barrel. His finger tightened on the trigger, tightened gently. The gun smacked against his shoulder. Thunder raced through the jungle.

He saw the hair curl where the bullet hit. It was lead, was that slug. It would hit and spread. It would make a tiny hole where it entered and a huge hole where it came out. It had a shocking power of thousands of foot pounds. He couldn't remember exactly how many thousands. It was designed to knock down an elephant.

Dark tried to bring the gun to bear for a second shot. To him it seemed that the charging mass was diving under the line of sight. He tried to depress the gun. He was still trying to depress it when he realized a heavy weight had slid against his legs and stopped. He looked down. *Klipura* lay on the ground. Shoulders against Dark's legs, the jungle demon lay on the ground. A tremble passed through the mass, a quiver. It was still.

Automatically, Dark clicked open the chamber of the rifle, slipped in fresh cartridges. He was aware that Mosier was talking.

"By gad!" Mosier was saying. "I'm sure as hell glad that is an elephant gun."

The biologist stepped around Dark, mopped sweat from his forehead. "By gad!" he repeated. "I'm glad that's an elephant gun!"

"So am I!" Dark said suddenly. There was a weakness in his knees. He sat down.

"Now," said Mosier, "With your permission, I'll take a few pictures of this beast."

"Hell, yes," Dark answered. "Take all the pictures you want."

He didn't care what the biologist did. All he was thinking was that *Klipura* was dead. To hell with what the beast was and where he had come from. It

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was dead. Now his workers would return to their tasks, helping him fight the jungle. Now he had proved to them that the jungle demon could be killed. They would not be afraid any longer. They would help him fight the jungle. He had won, the thought was in his mind. He had won the right to his rubber.

The thought was singing through his mind as they worked their way back home. He realized that Mosier was muttering about the possible origins of the creature he had killed, but he didn't pay any attention to the biologist. To hell with that. The thing that counted was that his rubber plantation had been saved. He detoured to look again at the growth of trees.

He came to the place where the jungle growth had been thinned, where the trees stood. He looked. Something choked him. There was an obstruction in his throat. His eyesight was blurring. Beside him, Mosier suddenly stopped talking. The biologist looked at the grove of trees. Merto looked at them. Both seemed to be dumfounded.

The trees were there. But they didn't stand erect any longer. They were on the ground. All of them. On the ground. Chips showed where axes had been used.

Chopped down. Every rubber tree. Already their leaves were curling in the heat of the dying sun.

DARK sat in the night on the porch and slapped at the mosquitoes. Inside the house he could hear Mosier puttering around as he developed the films he had taken. Below him on the steps a dispirited shadow sat.

"They not know," the shadow said, for the tenth time. "Master, they not know. They think the gods send *Klipura*. They have to make sacrifice to make the gods friendly again. It has to be big sacrifice because *Klipura* was big. They chop down trees. Make big sacrifice to the gods."

Dark said nothing. In his mind he cursed the natives, cursed the fears that had driven them to chop down his rubber trees as a sacrifice to their gods. That was what was wrong with working in this country. The natives could not understand, they could not be trusted. White men were needed to fight the jungle, white men who feared neither gods nor demons, and laughed at danger.

If he could bring white men in here! If! He could start over again. The trees would be transplanted and tended. They would send out new shoots from their roots. These shoots would grow. A new plantation could be started. It would take years, and a fortune. The world would be the gainer, by a new rubber tree. The world could use that, its appetite for rubber being what it was. But it would cost a fortune. Every dollar he owned and every dollar he could borrow had gone into this growth of trees. They would have been producing in another year, if the natives had not—

He cursed softly in the darkness.

"They not know," Merto almost whimpered. "They not understand."

"It's all right, Merto," Dark said. "It's not your fault that your people are afraid of demons."

Merto straightened up. "Make new plantation," he said. "Master and Merto. Grow new trees. My people not help, but Merto help. Merto not afraid. Merto and master grow new trees, whip jungle yet."

Dark swallowed. "You're all right, Merto. No, I'm afraid it wouldn't work. We need capital. We don't have it." He lapsed into silence.

Mosier came out of the building. He sat down on the steps. With exagger-

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ated slowness he lit a cigarette, slapped at the mosquitoes.

"How does it feel to be rich?" he said.

"I don't know."

"You ought to," the biologist continued. "You're probably the richest man in all Brazil right now."

"Cut out the damned chatter," Dark snarled. "Sorry," he apologized a second later. "I feel like the devil. Didn't mean to be snappish."

"It's all right," said the biologist. "But you are rich, you know."

A SUDDEN silence fell. Dark sat up in his chair. "What the devil are you talking about?" he demanded.

"My plates were all fogged," the biologist answered. "Every damned one of them. Not a picture in the bunch that's any good."

"So what? I lose a rubber plantation and you whimper because your pictures are no good."

"That's the point," Mosier answered imperturbably. "That's why you're rich."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about your rubber trees. They were a mutation. I'm talking about Merto. He's a mutation. I'm talking about *Klipura*. He was a mutation. You know what stock he came from? Ape. He was just an ape that forgot to quit growing. Something happened to his mother before he was born and he forgot to quit growing. Finally, I'm talking about my plates. They're fogged. No good."

"What does it add up to?"

"It adds up to radium. You located your rubber plantation right in one of nature's laboratories, right in a place where she creates new species. Your new rubber tree, Merto, *Klipura*, my fogged plates, all point to the same thing. There's a deposit of pitchblende somewhere near here. We crossed it today and didn't know it. Dark, damnit, you've lost a rubber plantation, but you've found what must be one of the richest radium deposits in the world."

Dark was suddenly out of his chair. He was shaking the biologist. "Damn you, are you sure?"

Mosier pushed him away. "Of course I'm sure. I don't know the exact location of the deposit but we can find it. Damn it, man, how was radium first discovered? By a fogged photographic plate! Of course I'm sure."

"My God!" said Dark. He sat down. Radium. He didn't doubt that the biologist knew what he was talking about. With radium as the goal, white men would come into the jungle. With radium paying the bills, he could hire men to replant his rubber plantation. Radium. Radium had created the rubber trees, had created Merto, and *Klipura*.

"I once said I wished I had a tribe like you to tend my rubber trees," Dark said suddenly. "How would you like to be my partner in helping discover and develop a radium mine?"

"White man, you've got yourself a partner," Mosier answered.

THE talking drums of the upper Amazon still whisper of the dance of the two crazy white men in celebration of the slaying of *Klipura*, the jungle demon. They still talk of demons, do these drums, whispering darkly of strange creatures that walk the night. They also tell of the many white men who came later, and of the clanking machinery they brought, seeking yet another demon who lurks in the earth. The white men are crazy, the drums whisper. The white men have no fear of demons and are therefore crazy.

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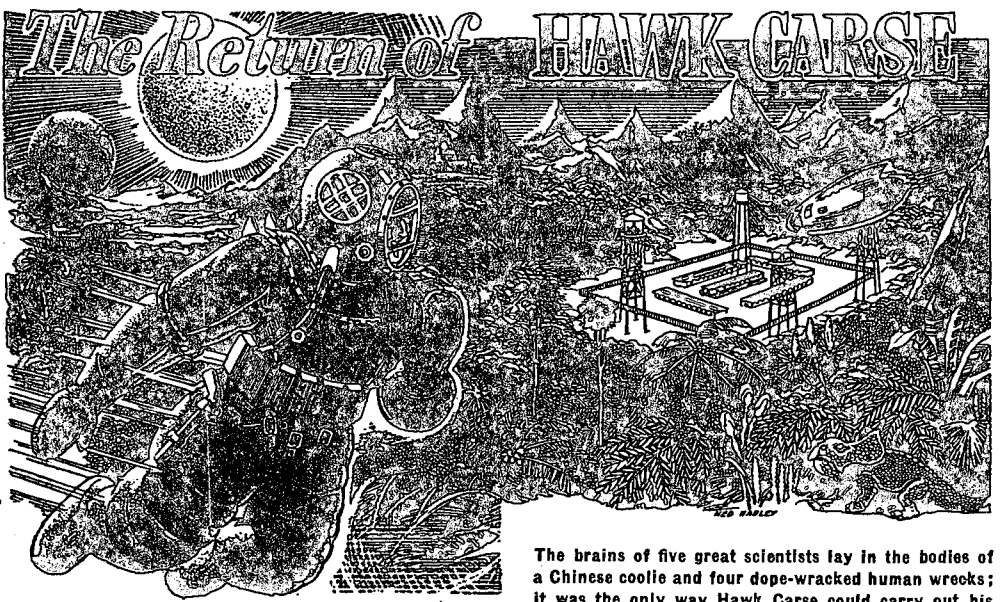
They tell also of how the two white men who slew *Klipura*, after they had gone down river and brought back with them many other white men who sought the demon in the ground, went yet farther up the river, taking with them, of all things, the tender shoots of trees. They say also how the white men carefully planted the shoots in the ground and brought still other white men to stand guard over them. "No doubt they will grow demons from these trees," the drums say, whispering sagely in the night.

The natives give these strange affairs a wide berth. No man not white dares pit his strength against the jungle demons. It is even whispered by the drums, not without some reason, that the two white men are themselves demons.

If the native giant who goes with the two white men, guiding them, working with them, hears the talking of the drums, he gives no sign. Deep in his heart he knows his masters are not demons.

"Men scared of nothing," he calls them. He is proud to be the friend of men who are scared of nothing, not even of demons.

THE END



The brains of five great scientists lay in the bodies of a Chinese coolie and four dope-wracked human wrecks; it was the only way Hawk Carse could carry out his promise to those scientists—and the promise of Hawk Carse was sacred. . . . Then Hawk Carse gave another promise. He would restore these scientists to their original form! What hope, what adventure, what danger arose when Hawk Carse gave his word! For in the background hovered the sinister figure of the brilliant Ku Sul, mortal enemy of the Hawk. See these classic personages of great science fiction clash again in the

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Tod Shayne looked at the mirror. Was it his imagination, or was he possessed of an evil spirit

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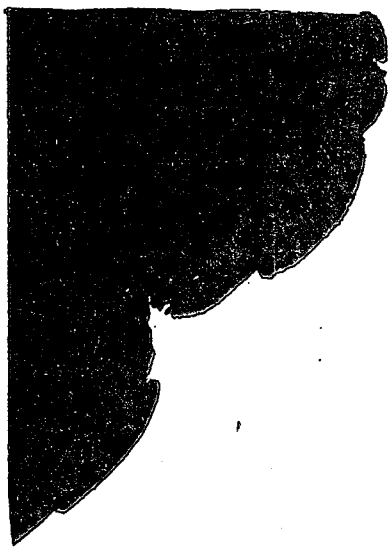

HEADLINES For Tod Shayne

by AUGUST W. DERLETH

Tod Shayne defied the curse of this old house because it would make headlines!

THIS time, for once, the idea was entirely his own. He need give no credit to his paid publicity man, and that naturally pleased Tod Shayne, with a corresponding inflation of his ego. Not that his conceit was too colossal. After all, he was the darling of millions of deluded ladies who had seen that profile and that chest on the silver screen, who had looked into those limpid eyes which could be so stern and unforgiving by dream-proxy thousands of times, and it was common knowledge that all the broken hearts he had left behind him, if laid end to end, would lead all the way from Wapping to St. John's Wood.

He had never married. Frankly, he was too much in love with himself. He never got tired of admiring his likenesses in the papers, the screen magazines, on the bulletin boards and the placards before theaters. At the moment, too, he was becoming bored and tired with the kind of thing Sam Postein was feeding the press: his new love, rumors of his impending engagement, et al. No, it was time for something more daring — something really startling — like going into the jungles and wrestling with a python.

Unfortunately, the jungles were too far away, and Shayne, truth to tell, was not even an Amazon in temperament. But Mr. Botil's Dreaded House—that was something! The house no one would live in! The shunned house. Mr. Botil had even given up trying to rent it.

That was the stuff for Tod Shayne. He could see the stories: *Cinema Idol Dares Supernatural—Screen Star Defies Powers of Darkness!* Just the right kind of publicity for the press to run in preparation for the official release of his next picture—*Spawn of Love*. As a matter of fact, Shayne had made certain that to the best of both scientific record and the accounts of laymen, nothing even resembling a ghost had ever been seen in this supposedly haunted house.

In the words of his American sojourn, it was a cinch!

The press came through. He knew he could count on Sam, once the idea had penetrated his skull. Tom Shayne got a great spread—though no one on

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the papers had any doubt but that it was all in the way of publicity for *Spawn of Love*. However, there were compensations for the newspapers: 137,377 yearning ladies assuaged their loneliness by sending tuppence for a copy of the new photograph of their darling. It was very enheartening to Tod Shayne to reflect upon all the feminine hearts palpitating and fluttering at the thought of his wanton exposure of himself to the forces across the great divide.

On the first evening of his residence in Mr. Botil's Dreaded House, which was, fortunately, in a good district not far from Park Lane—one to which he need not hesitate to invite his friends—Shayne had a dinner party to celebrate his daring, his ingenuity, and his prowess generally. He even thought to invite the eccentric old psychic researcher, Sir Wilmot Halvdan, who had taken the trouble to write him a note suggesting that he avoid residence in the Botil house.

Unfortunately for Tod Shayne, Sir Wilmot turned out to be a crusty old curmudgeon, who no sooner entered the house than he saw fit to protest Shayne's action. "Did it anyway, I see. Well, sir, I regret it. And so will you. Once you've had your publicity, I advise you to clear out."

"In my opinion, this house is a fraud, Sir Wilmot," said Shayne amiably.

The old man's eyes glittered and his smile was grim. "Do you know its history?" he barked.

"Certainly. I took the trouble to look it up—in detail."

"Pity you didn't put the facts together. If you had, you wouldn't be here. Slasher Lewes lived here first. He was a killer. He left his house a killer. This place has since killed two men and a woman."

"I didn't know you scientific men were given to romancing," observed Shayne with a superior smile. "I know about those three cases—lives of crime, all. They died by execution, and well away from the house."

Sir Wilmot's laugh was harsh and unpleasant. "Pity your research wasn't more thorough."

He was not a nice man. Neither Shayne nor his friends liked him. Nevertheless, Shayne was satisfied in his belief that he had told him off quite properly, and he slept soundly in his satisfaction.

CURIOUSLY, that first night was the only night he slept soundly. It might have been that all he ate and drank gave him a malaise on the second night. Be that as it may, he could not get to sleep for a long time. He lay in his luxurious bed with that indefinable feeling that something pressed in upon him, something urgent—almost like a presence in the room. However, even when he put on the light, he could not rid himself of that feeling. Moreover, as he lay there, trying in vain to sleep, he caught himself listening from time to time, as if to hear footsteps. He caught himself also wishing that the servants, who had a house of their own in back, had elected to remain in the house with him. His experience was not pleasant.

He managed two or three hours the second night. If he had been less able to throw off experience, he might have profited; unfortunately, the next morning's sun made it all too easy to blame his night's unrest upon something he had eaten. For a screen star, the idol of adoring millions, he was woefully unimaginative, and with that stubbornness born of egotism, he had always prided himself on that lack; it had made remorse over broken hearts so much easier to escape.

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His third night was even more surprising.

He fell asleep at once, and woke up, it seemed, immediately after. He had been sleeping only forty-five minutes, he saw by his watch, and yet he felt animated, full of life, eager to go somewhere. It was extraordinary, and this feeling was so strong that he could not rest until he got up and dressed and ultimately went out to a night club in Soho, which he had no sooner entered than his animation left him as inexplicably as it had come. An hour later he went back home to bed, very tired now. Yet, within two hours more, he was back in Soho.

That was the way it went all night. He managed two and a half broken hours of sleep.

On the fourth night he fell asleep quite easily and slept until four in the morning, when he woke up, feeling exhausted and astounded to find himself lying across the bed fully dressed. His memory was a little hazy, but he could have sworn that he had undressed and gone to bed.

By this time it was beginning to trickle past the gates of Shayne's colossal vanity that something was wrong either with the house or with him, and he went out of his way to pay his respects to Sir Wilmot Halvdan.

"You held out very well, remarkably well," said Sir Wilmot at greeting. "I thought I'd see you before this. Have you got out?"

Shayne shook his head, on the defensive at once. "What did you mean when you said that the house was a killer? I've hardly had a decent night since I moved in."

Sir Wilmot waved this away. "That's nothing—nothing at all. I expected more. I said the house was a killer, and so it is. It harbors the psychic residue of Slasher Lewes, and as far as I'm concerned, that residue is extremely active and extremely malevolent."

"But quite invisible," observed Shayne sarcastically.

"Oh, yes, certainly. You should be able to feel it, however."

"How?"

"Possession, Mr. Shayne. No doubt that manly chest and those piercing eyes will seem irresistible to the psychic residue of Slasher Lewes."

Shayne's vanity was touched—just pricked, but that was enough for Shayne. He announced that he had no intention of leaving the house, that he meant to see it through for a month at least.

"It will be the chance of his life for your understudy," crackled Sir Wilmot.

Tod Shayne was not in a good humor when he arrived home. Yet he was forced to put on his best front; there was a bobby waiting for him. Just routine questions. Had he heard anything during the night? Had he seen anything suspicious? Mystified, Shayne assured the bobby that he had slept like a top—as long as he had slept. That was until four.

"Lets you out, then. Two o'clock, the coroner said it was Mr. Fingerman was killed."

"Near here?"

"Block away. Right on the street, Mr. Shayne. Horrible thing—throat cut. Somebody must have been out to kill him; nothing had been taken. Except for that, it was just like Slasher Lewes' work."

Next day—after another sleepless night, during which he seemed constantly in violent struggle with some alien presence—Shayne received by the post a clipping of the story about the murder of Mr. Fingerman; it came anonymously and would have been most disconcerting had it not been that it was too easy for Shayne to guess

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that Sir Wilmot was needling him too subtly to be effective.

Nevertheless, he was troubled. Despite his resolutions, he packed his bag and went off to spend a few days in the country. The Sussex air and the Sussex lassies together convinced him that he had been acting like an awful fool; so in a week he came back to the Botil house, not without due fanfare by the press. Sam saw to that at Shayne's instigation. Sam had also worked up a ridiculously enthusiastic story featuring Mr. Botil, the agent, in a statement that Tod Shayne (the idol of millions), had broken the jinx on the house off Park Lane.

HE SENT Sam a check and settled back to devise something still more startling in the way of publicity.

He was destined to have plenty of publicity without much effort on either his part or Sam Postein's.

His routine in Mr. Botil's Dreaded House took up just where it had left off. It was now not so much the inability to sleep which troubled Shayne as it was the strange feelings he began to have. For one thing, he had the most extraordinary impressions whenever he took up a knife at table; he seemed to be growing stronger, almost brutally strong, and with the knife in his hand he lost all interest in the roast on the table and found his attention roving elsewhere, toward any movement in the room. Then there was the odd conviction he sometimes had that the face looking out at him from the mirror was not his; but there it was, the face which had launched a thousand times a thousand feminine hearts into dreamland—how could he make a mistake about that! Yet he had to confess that for the first time in his life he was actually conscious of being dissatisfied with that face—and this was so unlike him that he thought he must be ill.

On the third day after his return, Inspector Warborn called. "Funny business," he called it, yes, indeed. A woman of the streets this time. Slashed and slain, and not a clue to be had.

Tod Shayne racked his brains for thought of something he might have seen or heard—being well aware of the publicity value of contributing something which might help to track down the killer—but there was nothing. He invented a half-strangled scream which he thought he had heard at something like two o'clock. He knew Sam would be vexed that he had not taken the fullest advantage of the opportunity; but at least the fancied scream would be good for *Screen Idol Fixes Time of Crime.*

In the afternoon Sir Wilmot dropped in.

"Extraordinary," he said without preamble. "I thought it would be all over by this time, and here you are, chipper as ever. How do you feel?"

"All right," answered Shayne.

"Remarkable! I suppose, though, it's all that self-esteem that's got to be penetrated."

"By what?" demanded Shayne icily.

"By the house," retorted Sir Wilmot testily. "Really, Mr. Shayne, you persist in being obtuse. If I had any moral values, I'd hustle you out of here at once; I'd have done so before. It's too late now. But, frankly, I'm always interested in things like this. I sort of keep book on them."

"An old man's hobby, eh?" inquired Shayne dryly.

"You don't begrudge me it, do you?" Sir Wilmot's smile was not nice, definitely not. It gave Shayne a cold chill.

"I'll be old myself some day," said Shayne magnanimously.

"Oh, no, not at all," said Sir Wilmot,

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laughing. "How you do over-estimate yourself, Mr. Shayne! I wouldn't have believed it."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"You under-rate the psychic residue of Slasher Lewes." He leaned forward eagerly. "Haven't you felt it? Haven't you been—well, invaded?"

Shayne stared at him in amazement. "I can understand why you've been retired," he said unkindly.

Sir Wilmot sighed and clucked. "So unco-operative, too," he said, and left.

Shayne managed to cool his rage after half an hour when he devised the expedient of having a part written to burlesque a psychic researcher and slipped somehow into his next vehicle: *Passion's Relicts*. To top this off he telephoned the studio at once and barked out a few orders to get his new idea going. After this he felt better. He would rig up old Vansittart to resemble Sir Wilmot just short of libel and do him up brown.

His secretary appeared with a letter from a young lady, holding it gingerly between his thumb and forefinger, as if it were unclean, whereas it was only perfumed. "It's Miss Mandet again, sir," he said. "She insists. This is her fourteenth letter requesting an autograph. This time she enclosed a picture."

Shayne took it negligently. The picture, however, braced him up considerably. "Really not bad, is she? Let me see—suppose you write her a letter and ask her to come round tomorrow evening—eight o'clock or so."

"It wouldn't be good to set a precedent," protested his secretary.

"If they were all like this, it would," retorted Shayne, caressing his beautiful jaw speculatively, already seeing himself in his black silk dressing gown with the scarlet lining.

An autograph! Whereas authors, dramatists, poets, scientists, political leaders, *et al*, had a small opinion of their autographs, Tod Shayne was curiously certain that his was a gift to posterity. He bestowed it therefore as an accolade, or for a price; even the most precious possession has a price.

AT EIGHT o'clock the next evening he was quite alone. He had seen to that. The young lady, unfortunately, was somewhat late. It made Shayne restless, and he began to have that alien feeling again, the conviction that he was not alone, that he was two people and not one. And of course, there was only one Tod Shayne; there could never be another; for that reason the feeling that now possessed him was all the more ridiculous and absurd.

In the course of his restless waiting, he went out into the kitchen looking for a bite to eat, and there he discovered, well hidden in a crevice of a cupboard wall, a rusting knife. The moment he put his hand on it, he knew he had known the feel of this weapon before; it sent a curious, unnatural animation through him, and he began to tremble in an excitement he found difficult to control. He no longer had any doubt about the authenticity of his feelings; indeed, he thought of Tod Shayne as a person and personality quite apart from him. It made him almost giddy.

The knife was quite sharp, and it was rusty because it had been recently used and not cleaned. A strange brown rust, too, with a familiar look to it—as of something he had seen many years ago, decades ago, in his heyday. Heyday? But Shayne's heyday was now, today and tomorrow—not yesterday. Who said anything about Shayne? he asked himself almost belligerently.

The doorbell rang, and he went quickly, silently, almost furtively to answer it.

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"Oh, Mr. Shayne, so kind of you," gushed the young lady.

"Come in, Miss Mandet," he said coldly. "You've troubled us quite enough. Both of us."

"I'll just be a moment, Mr. Shayne. If you'll just autograph this photograph of you I bought."

His eyes shone, he smiled, he said, "I'll get my pen." He had the most extraordinary feeling of lightheadedness, and yet he was filled with purpose. He went back to the kitchen on light, eager feet, a kind of subnormal smile on his lips, a smile none of his adorers would have recognized—not for a moment. But he knew what he was about. He had done all this before; he had done it many times in many different ways. In his confusion of thoughts he thought of it nevertheless as a new role for Tod Shayne.

Miss Mandet's open, eager face swam at him as through a mist. She held out her photograph, looking almost fatuous. She was the embodiment of all those adoring millions who doted on the idol of the silver screen. But he was not looking at the photograph; he was gazing intently, piercingly, lovingly at her throat. And he brought out of his pocket not his fountain pen, but the rusted knife he had found in the kitchen.

He felt a fierce, surging of triumph as he reached for Miss Mandet.

IT WAS unfortunate that Shayne's secretary should have come back to the house just at that time. He said later he had returned to prevent Mr. Shayne from being indiscreet, but he had never dreamed of what he might find. Moreover, it was more than a coincidence that Inspector Warborn was in the neighborhood; so Tod Shayne spent the night in prison, loud in his protestations of innocence.

Sir Wilmot came to the trial and testified in his behalf. It was all so simple, he said engagingly. He called it variously metempsychosis and psychic residue. The psychic force of Slasher Lewes inhabited Mr. Botil's Dreaded House and took possession of whomever came to live in the house. It had already possessed two men and a woman before Mr. Shayne; the Crown would remember the cases and could make reference to them. All had been executed. Mr. Shayne, said Sir Wilmot, had begun to feel the influence of the Slasher's residue almost at once; he had put in some miserable nights, and on one occasion, when the Slasher had not quite succeeded in taking possession, he had been forced by the animation he experienced to rise and go out constantly during the night. But ultimately he had possessed Shayne, he had usurped his psyche. There had been two murders before the death of Miss Mandet, all done by Mr. Shayne under possession by Slasher Lewes, and all no doubt by the same knife. The simplicity of the matter was unfortunately clear to no one but Sir Wilmot Halvdan.

The opinion of the court, held strictly private, would have constituted a clear libel upon Sir Wilmot, had it been given utterance.

The idol of millions went to his doom, and the psychic residue of Slasher Lewes presumably went back to Mr. Botil's Dreaded House to wait for his next residence. Sir Wilmot said he knew no one would believe him, and went quietly home to add another to the Slasher's impressive score.

In one respect Tod Shayne's experience did not depart from his past: he got headlines that would have made him ecstatic; it was a pity he was in neither position nor condition to appreciate them.

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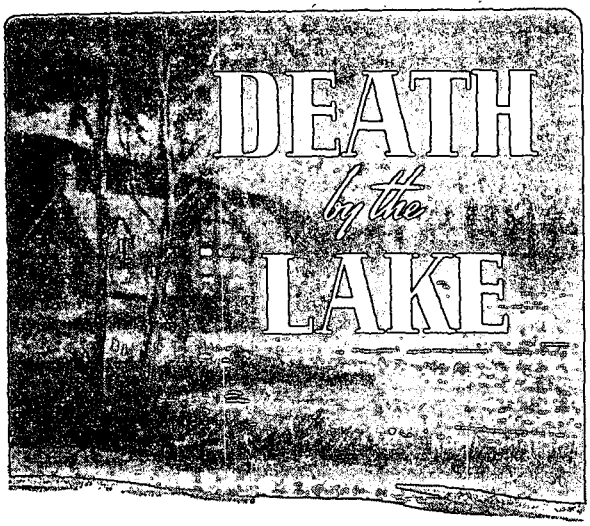

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MIND OVER MURDER, by David Wright O'Brien. The lovely hostess was dead. Around her stood a smiling crowd: including the swarthy stranger, the marcelled baritone, the bullying tycoon, his mousey wife. Lee Chance, psychologist, had to find the death wielder.

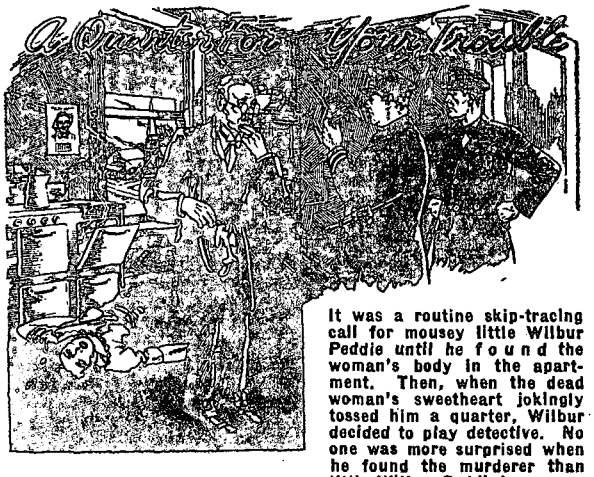
SIGHT UNSEEN, by Frank Clancey. Pigeon Leets was going into the big-time rackets and the old duffer he picked for his first victim made an ideal start; he even cooperated by sending the policeman away. Too bad the slip-up had to be so entirely unforseen.

HANDS DOWN, by Clee Garson. These local yokels would never catch on to the clever way Harker had stopped conscience-stricken Paul Benson from squealing. It had all been worked out perfectly, even to the fact that Benson was left-handed. It almost worked.

FOURTH DOWN—MURDER TO GO, by Leslie Owens. Larry Owens wasn't a murderer, but how to prove it? Bill Tracy hated to risk it, but by putting Larry in the game he knew he could draw the double murderer out into the open. Then Larry ran those winning yards.

ALL IN THE GIANT, 320-PAGE

MAY ISSUE



It was a routine skip-tracing call for mousey little Wilbur Peddie until he found the woman's body in the apartment. Then, when the dead woman's sweetheart jokingly tossed him a quarter, Wilbur decided to play detective. No one was more surprised when he found the murderer than little Wilbur Peddie!

It's tough when a cop has to expose the man who raised him, to show that man up as a racketeer. Yet Loring had to square himself with the men on the force. Those rapid advancements had earned him a nickname "Skyrocket."

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»»» Introducing «««

THE AUTHOR

Arthur T. Harris

MR. HARRIS (that isn't his real name, for reasons you will discover in a moment) is perhaps one of the most interesting writers ever to pen a story for *Fantastic Adventures*. When the editors received his current manuscript, a prophetic little gem concerning the future of World War II, we were naturally delighted. Mr. Harris' fantastic predictions are not strictly fiction, because he is extremely well fitted to know the "inside story" of international events.

During the first world war, Mr. Harris was actively engaged in Czarist Russia as a secret agent for a prominent world power, and as such, narrowly escaped death dozens of times. He has told us (guardedly of course) many interesting and intimate stories of the last days of the Czar's family and their sensational end.

Some years ago, we were in Milwaukee, visiting the famous humorist, Robert Bloch, and while we were there, engaged in a little humorous photography which resulted in one instance in the photo of Mr. Harris which you see on this page.

A fantastic story lies behind this photo, because the headgear which Mr. Harris wears is (he says) almost identical to a hasty disguise which he donned and which allowed him to escape a trap laid for him by a leading German secret operative in a little village on the outskirts of St. Petersburg.

Mr. Harris, carrying tremendously important secret documents, found himself trapped in a tiny inn by no less than eight enemy agents. The innkeeper was murdered, and his dead body lay behind his desk. Mr. Harris, discovering it, realized that something was wrong. Dashing up the stairway, he heard the agents smash in the door below in search of him. Casting about for a disguise, our hero snatched an old, moth-eaten muff from a hanger, donned a small lamp-shade, slipped the muff over it, and leaped out the window. There was no escape by this means, but concealed by shrubbery from outposts stationed at the rear of the inn, he slunk toward the front door and walked in with consummate bravado, singing a gay Russian ballad, and pounded on the desk for a room.

The enemy agents, frustrated, their prey having flown, rushed out, shoving him rudely aside, entirely fooled by his fantastic disguise.

"That demonstrates the stupidity of the German agent," said Harris. "It is no wonder they lost the war! A muff and a lampshade!"

We roared with laughter, and Robert Bloch suggested a pictorial reconstruction of his disguise.

Today Mr. Harris is once more engaged in his daring work, but between jobs, finds time to do a short yarn or two for his old friends.

You have read several of his stories in past issues, all of which have dealt with some phase of the war. It is easy to see that his interest, in spite of the great danger that accompanies it, is and always will be with espionage.

We remember him especially for his intrigues even during peace-time. Never were we able to plan an event without finding, to our amazement, that an intricate series of developments which we could not even guess at would occur to throw things into the wildest confusion, out of which Mr. Harris would emerge the only man with a clear picture of what was going on.

Mr. Harris is a strange figure: you would not believe that this little man could be the mental and athletic giant that he really is. It is something akin to the famed spring that Ponce de Leon sought that keeps him apparently ageless. He was born in 1891, and today appears to be a man of not more than thirty!

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READER'S PAGE

S.O.S.
CABOT AND McGIVERN TORPEDOED!

Sirs:

A friend of ours in our section recently purchased the May issue of your mag. Another fellow and myself have come to the conclusion that it is utterly mad and how anyone can write it is beyond us. The persons who write this trash must have warped minds. Especially the story about "The Daughter Of The Snake God" is the most despicable hunk of tripe that was ever written. We also figure the persons with the contorted minds are writing this stuff for people who are half whacky themselves. We gathered the opinions of other fellows in the service and they think they're really bad.

This is an open letter and no slander is intended in it. We are just giving you our opinion to how we feel against stories like these.

A. S. NORMAN R. GROCHOWSKI,
A. S. ROBERT C. GREENE,
A. S. GEORGE A. GORECKI,
A. S. BERNARD G. GOREGH,
A. S. FRANK J. GOUZYCN,
A. S. WILLIAM R. GRINDSTAFF,
(Company 19, Sec. A, U.S.N., U. S. Naval Training School, Navy Pier, Chicago, Ill.)

It looks like the navy really sank us on this one! We're sorry you didn't like the story, boys. And we'll try to keep from repeating. We re-received many commendatory comments on the story from other readers, several of which follow. But that's what makes an editor's life interesting; and hectic!

A fantastic fact crops up in your letter. Each and every one of you have a last name beginning with "G." Talk about coincidence!—Ed.

FANTASY AT ITS VERY BEST

Sirs:

I have just finished reading the May issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. This is by far one of the finest yet. The cover is positively superb. Smith has done a fine piece of work here.

"Daughter Of The Snake God" was the best story I have ever read in either FANTASTIC or *Amazing*. This is fantasy at its very best. More stories like this, please.

If possible I wish you would bring Burroughs back, as he is my favorite author and has turned out some wonderful stories for you.

Please lay off the space yarns and ease up on the humor. Space yarns should especially not appear in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

Put St. John on the cover more often.

I would like to locate someone who has a copy of the book "The Land That Time Forgot" by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

ROY HETHERINGTON, JR.,
478 Burnley Lane,
Drexel Hill, Pa.

We've often said that when a story gets comment that is widely varied, the story is a success. We surely got varied comment on this one! All the way from despicable to very best.

No doubt Burroughs has more work under way which we'll get a chance to look at before very long.

St. John is on this cover, and also, if you care to take notice, on the July issue of Amazing Stories which is now on the stands.

We hope you locate a copy of the book you want. If not, we suggest you write Burroughs at Tarzana, California. It is possible a copy can be gotten in that way.—Ed.

SUICIDE WEATHER

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for some time and find them very interesting. In the May issue they rate with me as follows:

1. Daughter Of The Snake God.
2. Madémoiselle Butterfly.
3. Secret Of The Golden Jaguar.

The others were very good, but do not suit my particular fancy.

Please explain "Suicide Weather" mentioned in "Strange Facts," page 144. Said article was not very clear to me and I cannot see why the weather would affect a person in such a way as to drive him to suicide.

I will congratulate you on your success in the wonderful stories that I have read in the past three years and hope for your continued success in future issues. I find your stories a wonderful base for discussion and argument with my companions.

R. R. MERRITT,
Btry B, 205FA Btn,
Fort Lewis, Wash.
APO 41.

Gray, cloudy weather may depress some people, but what is really meant here, we believe, is the fact that barometric pressure has a physiological effect on many persons, perhaps even causing nervous

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reactions which might approach the borderline of hallucination. Actually, the fact is that weather changes do cause mental and body changes in the human being, and certain weather factors may prove extremely depressing. Statistics on weather conditions at the times of great suicide levels prove that bad weather has its effect.—Ed.

WE LIKE THIS "NUTT"!

Sirs:

Perhaps you wonder why I am flooding you with so many letters? Well, it is because you are so darn good. . . . The May issue was better than anything you have ever put out. Before I start a conversation, I would like to rate it.

Cover: FANTASTIC ADVENTURES has never put out a cover to equal Smith's pic. It is surpassed only by the master, Finlay. Smith is by a wide margin your best cover artist. It was formerly Fuqua.

Back cover: No back cover as yet, but when you do have one I will be willing to bet my bottom dollar that it'll be super.

Interior pics: Magarian's for "Mr. Pym Makes A Deal" was an illustration that is equal to Finlay, maybe better.

Stories: There (as usual) wasn't a dud among them. They were all good. But I think the best was "Daughter Of The Snake God." Worst was "Brother Michel." I think collaborating authors is a good idea.

Articles: Surprisingly good.

Cartoons: I don't like the idea of repetition. 'N that's enough about the magazine for May.

I have one complaint. In St. John's illustration for Burroughs' "City Of Mummies" if you will see Burroughs' book "Swords Of Mars" and turn to page 36, you will see that it is a direct copy. St. John only illuminated a few details and added the opponent.

Get more stories by A. R. Steber.

CHARLES NUTT,
3025 Ainslie St., Chicago, Ill.

THE WEIRD DOOM OF FLOYD SCRILCH

(Concluded from page 97)

thing, and I hear another sound.

The floor rips further. I hear Scrilch give just one last scream, and then I hear the other sound again.

But the other sound comes from far away, because I am already out the back door and running down the street.

I never go back. Because now I know what happens to Floyd Scrilch. He answers the wrong ad.

* * *

LEFTY FEEP took his elbows out of the butter plates and gave a long sigh.

"Poor Floyd," he whispered, reminiscently.

I coughed discreetly.

"There's just one thing bothering me," I said.

"Name it and you can have it."

"Well—apparently, Floyd Scrilch was killed there in his cellar. But I don't see how it happened."

"He gets swallowed," Feep told me.

"Swallowed?"

"Sure. For answering the wrong ad."

"But what is this thing that grows down there and makes the floor creak?" I asked. "What did you smell and hear at the last? In plain words—what was it that Floyd Scrilch kept in his cellar?"

"That I never know," Feep answered.

"I thought so!"

"Except for a lucky break of mine," Lefty Feep added, triumphantly. "When I run out of there I happen to have an ad in my hand. I hang on to it unconscious. And later, when I look at it, I figure out what Floyd does. This is the last ad he tells me he answers. And it works too good again. So he gets killed."

"You mean this ad tells what he had down there in the cellar?"

"Look for yourself," said Lefty Feep.

He reached into his vest pocket and handed me the crumpled piece of paper.

The advertisement was quite small. I read only the top line, but that was enough.

"Earn Big money!" the advertisement urged. *"Use Your Own Basement to Raise Giant Frogs!"*

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We could hardly say the illustration was a direct copy of "St. John illuminated a few details and added the opponent." We know that many artists "copy" figures and incorporate them into new drawings. Sometimes we even supply an artist with clippings which show a more beautiful face, etc. St. John has used several of his "monsters" over again, notably his pterodactyl. Robert Fuqua copies "Don Hargreaves" over and over again, since he is a character. He also copies "Adam Link" in each new drawing.—Ed.

MORE PICS WANTED

Sirs:

I say keep the "Mac girls" and more of them. You have a pretty fair cover on your May issue.

I would like to make a few suggestions for the mag. Why don't you try to have more pictures on the inside of your book? It makes them more interesting. Then you know what kind of animal the writer is describing.

Your May issue is an astounding comeback. This issue is so good that I had to stop before I finished it and write to you. I have just read seven of your eleven stories and they were, in order of rank:

1. Daughter Of The Snake God. 2. Gather Round The Flowing Bowler. 3. The Phantom Armada. 4. Brother Michel. 5. Mr. Pym Makes A Deal. 6. Secret Of The Golden Jaguar. 7. The Magic Flute.

"Gather Round The Flowing Bowler" was one of the funniest stories I've ever read.

O. A. Smith, Jr.,
2251 Sonoita Ave.,
Nogales, Ariz.

We're happy to see you like Lefty Feep. He's a new and increasingly popular character.—Ed.

THE WORD IS . . .

Sirs:

Just like to give word on the April ish, the word is Superb. Why don't you do that more often? Keep that up. Only one story not up to par. Malcolm Smith is good at covers but absolutely putrid at interior work. Now mind you, I'm not saying anything against him but he's simply putrid. But his covers are smash hits—everyone of them are super. Why, oh why in the deleted by censor don't you ditch Jay Jackson? Have you ever received a compliment on his work? I join the clamor for trimmed edges.

Charles Nutt,
3025 Ainslie St.,
Chicago, Ill.

Glad you like Smith's covers. And sorry you don't like Jackson's interiors. We receive many compliments on his work.—Ed.

(Concluded on page 235)

You Also Serve

If You Work Efficiently in the Home Trenches

Many millions of us are soldiers in this war although we can never join the armed forces. Ours is the job of backing up our army and navy in office and store and factory and home.

Like the man in the armed ranks, you can serve best only if you are trained—trained for greatest ability. Winning the war needs your best possible knowledge and service on your present job or on the more responsible job for which you can prepare. That will mean more profit for you but more importantly it will mean better service toward victory.

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COVER WOULD HAVE SOLD HIM

Sirs:

Congrats on the May issue; the best of this year, with the best doggone fantasy cover I've ever had my peepers on. If I had never read your magazine before, that cover would have sold me for life. It was 100 times better than Smith's attempt on the April issue.

Magarian's pic for "Mademoiselle Butterfly" was the best interior illustration, and the one for "Gather Round The Flowing Bowler" was the worst. I don't know who drew it, as he was obviously too ashamed to sign his name to it, but tell him to look at a bowling alley someday. It's at least 25% longer than the one he drew.

Not a single bad story.

I want more and more serials, but not longer than three parts.

I buy your Quarterlies too, but they should have stiffer covers and trimmed edges.

I agree with your readers who want the Mac Girl, but not too often. Non-readers might get the wrong impress of FA.

By the way, McCauley, you'd better watch that Smith feller. That girl riding the snake—not bad, brother.

GENE HUNTER,
616 E. McCarty Ave.,
Jefferson City, Mo.

Thanks for all the kind comments, Gene. We'll give you more serials, more Mac Girls, more good stories. And that finishes us for now.—Ed.

VITALITY FOR MURDER

(Concluded from page 115)

He fell. The beast was upon him, tearing and clawing at him with the savage energy of hate. . . .

Slip Martin became dimly conscious of someone pulling the dog away from him. Then he was lying there upon the floor, bleeding from a score of wounds—the same as he had been six weeks before. And a tube in the machine was broken. It would take two weeks to construct a new one. . . .

A shadowy figure was standing over him. It was Dr. Abbott. But the man was not gloating now. Instead, there was a look of pity upon his face.

He heard Dr. Abbott speak. "You made a lot of bad mistakes, Slip Martin," the man said. "But the worst mistake you made was when you turned the switch the wrong way *and set the tubes to working in reverse . . .*"

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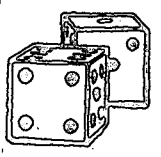

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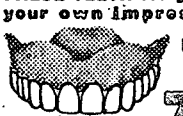

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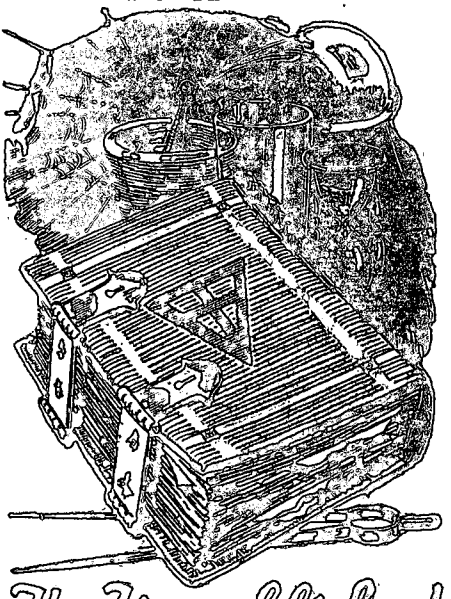

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ZEUS—The Thunder God

by HENRY GADE

Behind the legend of the thunder god lurks a fantastic probability; he was a scientist

HOMER tells of Zeus as the supreme god even in his day (950 B.C.), which establishes him as pre-eminent from a much earlier age, since the evolution of the gods in those early times was a very slow process. It is impossible to trace this god back to any special stock or particular locality. His association with Olympus and Thessaly indicated that his entry was the same as that of the Greeks when they first entered Greece.

There are two aspects of Zeus that must be considered. One is that of an amorous and capricious deity often lacking in real dignity and power. The other is in his greater guise as the all-father; the deity of the sky; the ruler of the air; the deity of the bright day, who sends the rain, the wind and the dew; the god of the thunder.

There is also mention of Zeus as the god of gluttony, and the god of human sacrifice. However, these are minor legends and do not typify him in his major role.

As the amorous god, his attributes as god of the air related him to Mother Earth. Thus he was allied with the earth-goddess, of whom his feminine counterpart, Dione, was the personal form. In this association he resided on Earth at Dodona, where he remained until the Hellenic tribes brought him down from the Balkans, to Greece.

However, in spite of his amours and infidelities, he is the patron-god of monogamic marriage, or of having only one mate. His union with Hera was the divine type of human wedlock.

But the thunder is really his most striking manifestation, and much of his ritual was weather-magic. A god of this character would naturally be worshipped on a mountain-top, and the large number of appellatives derived from the names of mountains are thus explained.

There are, of course, many legends of varying nature regarding Zeus, which can be deeply gone into by the student of ancient mythology of the gods, but they lend little reality to him beyond a deepening conviction that his origin was human. He is said to have been fathered by the Stoics, an extremely ancient race, legendary even in the time of Homer.

To this race, quite conceivable as a people of some commanding civilization, legend ascribes many powers. Chief of them has been the complacency that gives rise to the word "stoic." In this we may detect a certain element of assuredness on the part of the Stoics which lead to believe they had reason to remain unexcitable in the face of danger—this reason probably being a power that made them at least feel that they were invincible and would overcome all threats.

This power may be that which manifests itself in Zeus as the thunder-god attribute. In short, the thunder may be a physical manifestation or interpretation of the power or weapon that gave to the Stoics their most-remembered trait.

The logical assumption is that this power was electrical in nature. Perhaps Benjamin Franklin was not the first human to "discover" electricity, or was Thomas Edison the first human to put it to great practical use.

Let us collect all the loose threads of the legends that surround Zeus, and theoretically analyze his reality insofar as the pre-Hellenic and Hellenic peoples were concerned.

What happened to the Stoics we do not know. It seems likely to assume that Zeus, perhaps as a young man, wandered afar from his native people, and established himself in the vicinity of Olympus and Thessaly. There, with his great stature (he was a giant figure) and with his electrical science, he became a feared and respected entity in the neighborhood.

It is inevitable that he soon surrounded himself with followers, and became a ruler with such power that he assumed the stature of a deity.

When these pre-Hellenic men came down from the Balkans, perhaps inspired by his science, they established the Greek empire. Of course, Zeus did not actually come with them, except as a legend, because he had long-since either died (apart from his followers) or returned to the country of the Stoics. But he did come with them as a legendary god who became the father of all gods, the most supreme of deities, the master of thunder.

What was the power that Zeus possessed that enabled him to gain a reputation as the master of thunder? Was it perhaps an electrical weapon that generated a thunderbolt which could kill or destroy at a distance? Was it a "ray" gun? Was it a type of controlled fireball?

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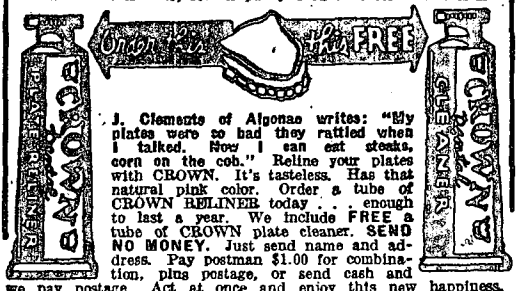

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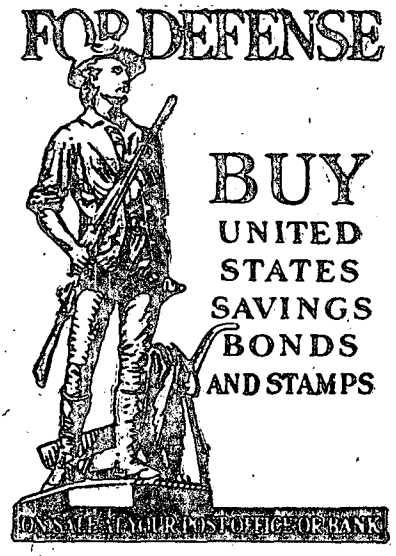

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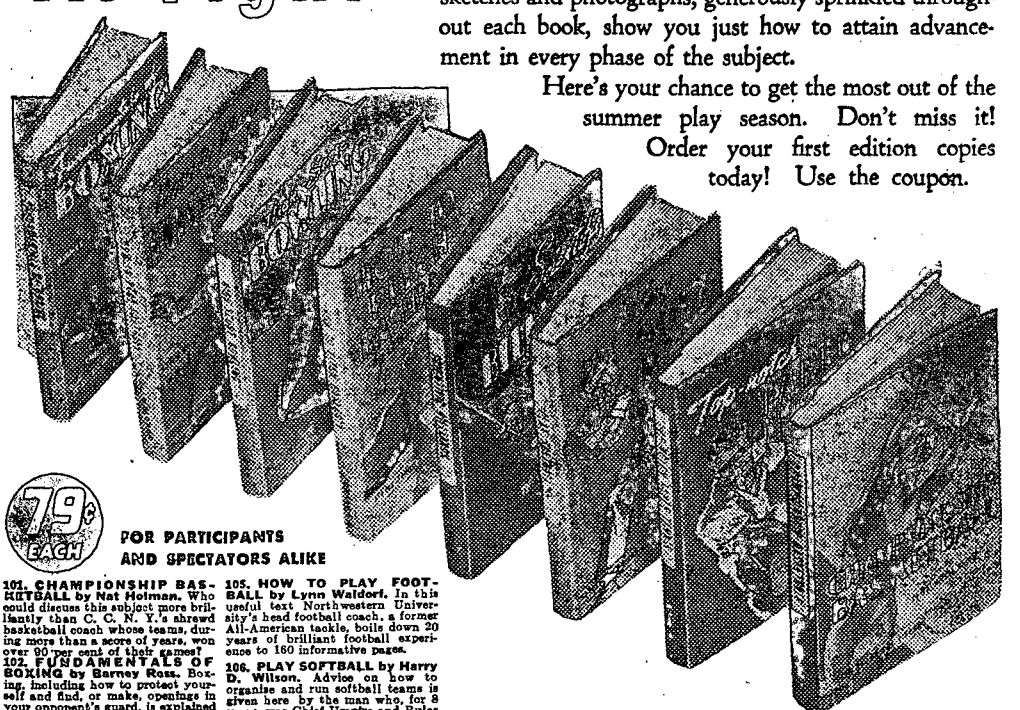

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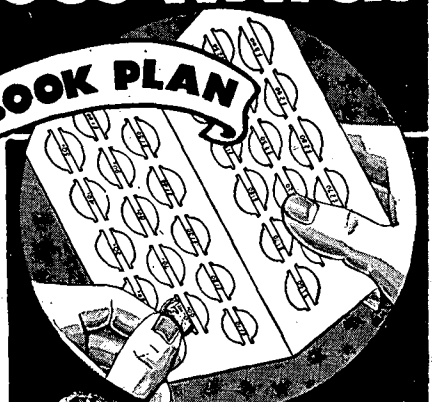

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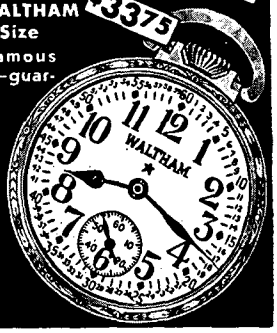

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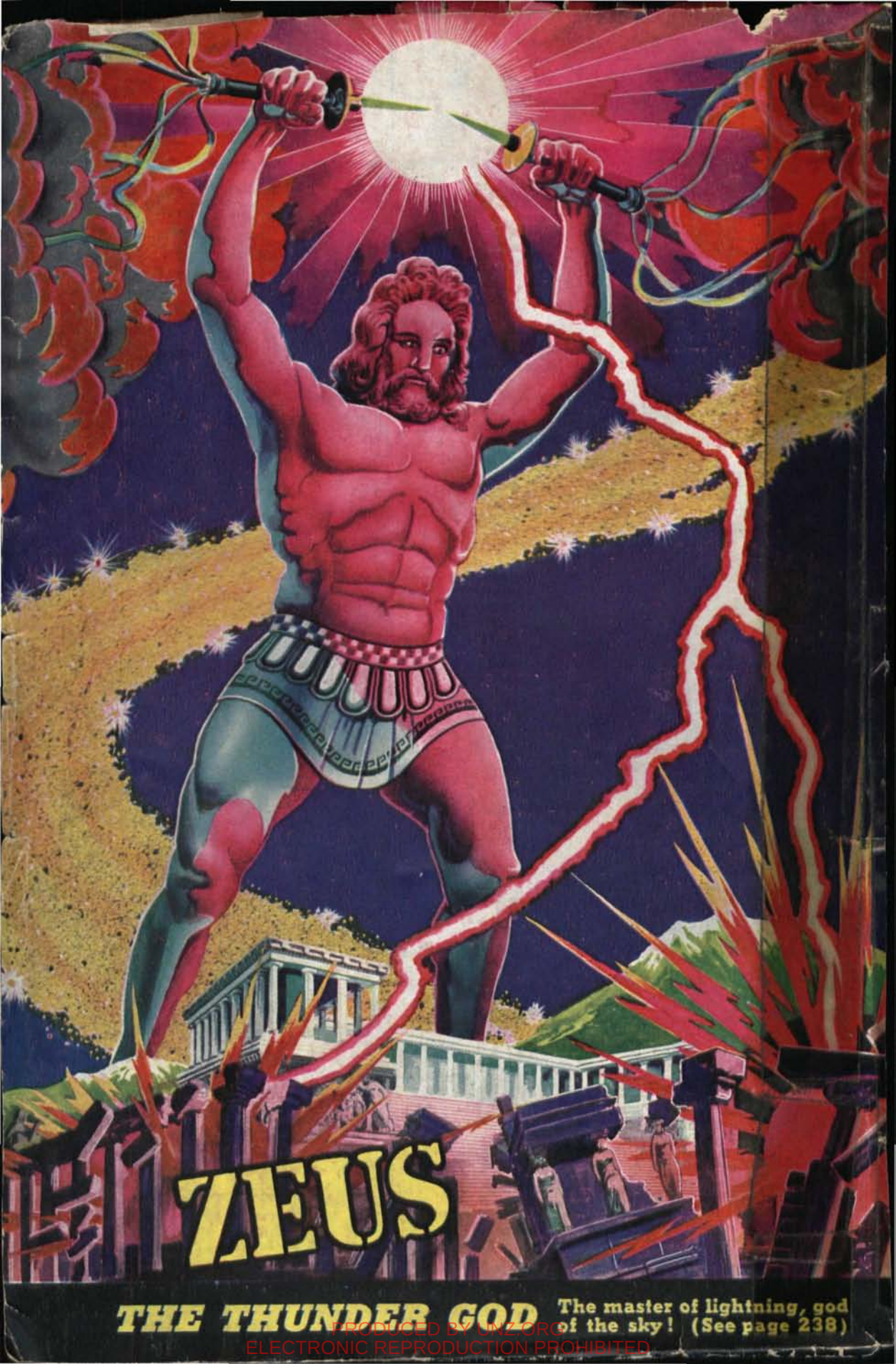

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